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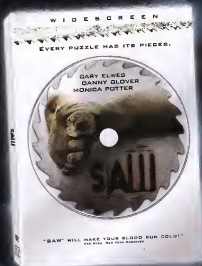
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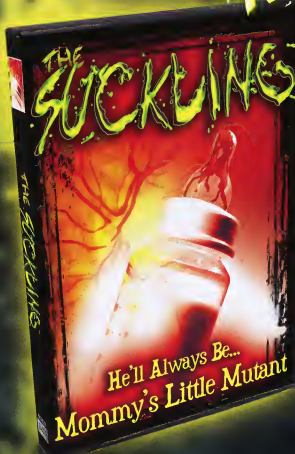
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KILLING CHARLES MANSON

Renegade filmmaker Jim VanBebber discusses his fifteen-year-long struggle to complete *The Manson Family*, a brutal mockumentary that dares to shatter the illusion of one of America's most iconic murderers. Plus: Some words with Philip Anselmo, on his score. by Rod Galdino, Jovanka Vuckovic and John W. Bowen

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No soul.

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Here it is, the essential guide to all the best horror happenings in North America. by Staff

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Issue #33 March 2005

Note From Underground



If the substance of horror is fear, then the essence of it must be death. Death – the final Rubicon, the undiscovered country, the sum of all fears – the essence of all fears. Long ago, a Greek slave who was also a philosopher made a casual remark that seems to fly in the face of all of the horrors ever perpetrated in every movie and in every book. “Death is nothing,” he said casually.

Of course, he was right. Unfortunately, this is not a truth that comes easy to us, given that our culture – and global culture in some form all the way from Plato to New Ageism – has laboured under the conception that human beings have a soul and that this soul somehow survives after death. Wherever it goes after that is always a point of contention, but the basic premise is seldom disputed. But really, if you think about it, it's unlikely that the soul lives on. It's unlikely, in fact, that the soul even exists.

When I try to remember the earliest memory of my life, an image comes to mind of being strapped to a car seat – this little lingering memory of being a baby – but further back there is nothing. And yet things happened, lots of grand, important, historical things. But for me there was only blackness and silence until the day when, all of a sudden, I was being strapped to a baby seat.

And it dawned on me at some point that if decades and centuries and millennia ticked by happily without me, why couldn't it happen again? One day there is everything; thoughts, desires and every memory of everything singing in your ears with the rush of your own blood. And then, at the turn of a second, it's gone. The world continues and great things still happen, but we're back in that empty blackness, that silent nothing with nothing in it, not even a single solitary thought.

Or look at it this way: have you ever been so dog-tired, so utterly knackered that you passed out into a deep dreamless sleep? Sure you have; and when you woke up, you were vaguely aware that for the past six or eight or ten hours you were utterly oblivious to everything, including your own existence. You were dead to the world as they say, though it's closer to the truth to say that you were practising to be dead. And if anyone would have stopped by to look at you, they would have said that you were great at it.

So death is nothing, and if death is nothing, then there's nothing to fear, right? Well, not exactly. The human instinct, so we are told, is always for self-preservation, and though self-preservation is often taken to indicate the protection of the physical body, more importantly it means the preservation of the thing that runs the body: the mind.

The mind is powerful and delicate; it has the power to abstract and construct, imagine and recreate, and through a union of these attributes it can convincingly face its own destruction, just by thinking about it. At times the reaction can be so strong that it affects the body. But would that reaction be as strong if, deep down inside, we knew that we were going to survive? That somewhere in our genetic code was a fail-safe switch called the “soul” which was going to allow us to bail out at the last possible second and live on in an afterlife of eternity?

I don't think so. The reason we experience horror, I think, is because horror is what happens when the mind is confronted with its destruction and obliteration – its return to that silent blackness from which it inexplicably came, and to which it will inexplicably be thrust back into. A truth that doesn't hurt so much as it perfectly heretics our sense of self-preservation.

Whether you're drawn to the beautiful griminess of shudder pulp art, or the verité grotesque of Jim VanBebber's *The Morrison Family* or the frightful flesh portraits of Bob Tyrrell, ultimately you're engaging your mind in a contemplation of what it has – or more accurately lacks – at its very core. Think about it: if the soul existed your body wouldn't ever experience true fear, less so over a scary horror movie. But it does, because somewhere deep inside it recognizes that there is no soul and that when your death happens, it happens completely. But take heart, because it's probably only the people who can enjoy fear in this life who will likely appreciate the good night's sleep of eternity.

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Rue Morque #43 is dedicated to
Kenneth "Raz" Bonner

COVER: THE MORRISON FAMILY

DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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RG

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

I PICKED UP YOUR issue with Gurnie on the front in the classic Texas Chainsaw Massacre photo (RM#42), and I am impressed! I was delighted to find a crew of intelligent and seemingly well-educated horror fans who are not restricted only to film but instead embrace all forms of the genre. This horror fan has been waiting for a top quality horror magazine and now I finally have one! One last thing; it's no fair you have horror cinema nights at the Bloor Cinema in Toronto; you have to expand to Chicago.

Alex Temple - Chicago, Illinois

RE: RM#42. On page 34, at the bottom of the left-hand corner picture "Detail on Fireplace, Castle Leslie..." there appears to be an apparition of a woman on the left side of the photograph. I may have an overactive imagination but take a look for yourself. Maybe you can mention it in your next issue so other readers can see for themselves if they haven't already noticed it!

Mike Freency - Chincoteague, Virginia

IN RM#42, page 74, in the Gore-Met section, you reviewed two films: *Kickass*, *Banquet of the Beasts* and *Living Hell* Special Edition. On the lower right-hand side of the page, the bloody skull thing says, "...the woman bobbing for shotted foetuses while having a bucket of piss poured on her head in *Living Hell* might have gone a little too far." I have the same edition of *Living Hell* that you reviewed, and the scene you described simply isn't in the film! What gives?

Name and address withheld

Tip, that was an editorial error where the wrong caption was used. In fact, the film being talked about is called *Filthy Look* for it in a future issue of *Rue Morgue*!

YOU'VE DEFINITELY HOOKED a new reader, but maybe you guys need to double-check your journalism a little more carefully. In Deadlines you refer to Christian Bale's character in *The Machinist* as Trent Reznik. As close to the NIN frontman as the character's name is, it's actually Trent Reznik. Also, Dave Alexander's review of the *EvilDead* DVD reissue incorrectly states that Clint Howard's character plays his classmates' hearts out. If my memory serves me correctly, it was Joseph Conte's junior character who did the solo heart-riding. Wow, I guess I'm just too much of a horror nerd, which is why your magazine is the perfect read for me!

Ryan McCabe - Austinville, Ohio

I WAS GLAD TO READ Rod Gudino's heartfelt editorial in *RM#40* suggesting *Rue Morgue* would make a better effort to cover horror lit in the future. In that issue and the next, horror lit fans were treated to fantastic articles on upcoming Leisure horror writers and a two-page spread on Jack Ketchum. But in your most recent issue, *RM#42*, there is zilch, nada, nothing devoted to horror lit, save for a couple of anthology reviews. Why? There is certainly no shortage of talent out there to which *Rue Morgue* has yet to devote space to, like authors Bentley Little, Edward Lee, Tom Piccirilli, Simon Clark, and Scott Nicholson. The list goes on. Please make good on your suggestion to cover more horror lit in the future. Your faithful readers are holding you up to it.

Matt King - Toronto, Ontario

ASKING YOUR SUBSCRIBERS to support an additional issue while they wait for their subscription to resume is both a poor tactic and incentive. Why do you feel the subscriber should have to pay, especially since these issues have already been published? I mean, what's to collect? Why not include the Special Collector's Edition as part of the current subscription, in lieu of the delay? Did it not occur to you that your subscribers will see this bold move as a blatant money grab? (I certainly do.) I purchased a two-year subscription because I love your magazine, I love the horror genre, but this just makes me angry. Your subscribers deserve better. I suggest you give them the issue free. I look forward to reading your reply.

Andrew Mahadack
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

The reason the Special Collector's Edition was not offered to subscribers is because many subscribers already have one or all of the first three issues, which would mean that we would be forcing them to pay for issues they already have. Secondly, not all of our subscribers are collectors, many subscribe to the magazine for info on upcoming movies, etc., which that Collector's Edition does not have and those people would therefore not want it. The only way to get around this would be to either a) poll every subscriber on whether they have the issues or not and whether they want them, which would be a costly administrative nightmare, b) give them out for free which is good-natured but economically impossible or c) give the subscriber the option of

buying the issue in stores if they want it, and save them money if they don't, which is what we opted to do.

I'VE COME TO the conclusion that your publication is the product of nothing other than pure evil. Over the short time I've been reading it you've managed to transform a mediocre hawker for zombies into a full-blown horror obsession. Not only has my horror DVD collection increased 1000 percent, I've found myself buying genre comics and graphic novels. Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft have found their way onto my bookshelf, and I seem to be waiting anxiously of every back issue of your depraved periodical available on eBay. If I find myself picking up those *Hellraiser* dolls or *The Mist* greatest hits, I'm calling an exorcist. To say the least, you are draining my pockets dry. Damn your insightful reviews, intelligent commentaries, thoughtful topic variety, and enticing design layouts. Damn them back to that evil place from whence they came!

Mark Shallow - St. Johns, Newfoundland

MANY PARENTS WOULD OBJECT to the increasingly bloody, violent, gothic theme of your magazine, but to give them a greater outcry would be the rudity on pages 50 and 51 (*RM#41*). I think you have a great magazine - one of my favorites - but don't give parents and teachers weapons to boycott it. *Famous Monsters* magazine is respectable for youth and adult, which kept it surviving through all the parental/teacher outcry over the magazine. Go back and remember your roots and theme, and grow into a modern-day horror magazine that can be enjoyed and respected by all ages.

William Edwards - address withheld

RE: *RM#43* On page 54, the Kolchak review states Richard Christian Matheson as the screenwriter. In fact, his father Richard Matheson adapted this from *The Kolchak Tapes*, a novel written by Jeff Rice.

Clark Nova - address withheld

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to: info@rue-morgue.com or:
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Dreadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Blair Witch creators return to horror with solo projects



Daniel Myrick sets his sights on a psychological thriller.

Six years after Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's microbudget mockumentary phenomenon *The Blair Witch Project* broke \$250 million in worldwide sales, the filmmakers are back with separate supernatural-themed features. Myrick's *Solstice* and Sánchez's *Probed* (www.probedmovie.com) are both budgeted under \$10 million and go into production this spring. Speaking from his office in Pasadena, California, Myrick told *Rue Morgue* that *Solstice*, which he adapted with his wife, is based on the Danish film *Midsommer* (2003).

"It's a tight little scary psychological thriller about a group of kids," he reveals. "I don't want to give too much away, but one girl—the lead—discovers her sister did some pretty bad things prior to her suicide. There are definitely spiritual and supernatural elements playing throughout, and it plays on a lot of the same kind of neuroses *Blair* did, but it's not as in your face. It's a, dare I say, cerebral kind of horror movie."

Myrick adds that *Solstice* will have a '70s horror feel reminiscent of classics like *The Shining*, *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*. Shooting begins in May in Louisiana, with a tentative release date set for Halloween 2005.

Also in May, Eduardo Sánchez's *Probed* begins shooting in Orlando, Florida, with Steve Yedlin (*May*, *Toolbox Murders* remake) on board as Director of Photography. The alien abduction film, written by newcomer Jamie Nash, will co-star *Blair Witch* actor Mike Williams as a character named Otis, and will likely be released next spring.

"It's science fiction, it's horror," says Sánchez. "There's a really cool monster in it, but it's a lot more than just this film about alien abduction. We took a little bit of *Fire in the Sky*, making it more of a drama. It's a story of these guys who were abducted and how this thing has really messed their lives up."

Sánchez reveals that *Probed* is also influenced by '80s horror flicks like *Evil Dead 2*, and is lighter in tone than *The Blair Witch Project*.

"After *Blair Witch* we were just so burned out on horror," he says. "*Blair Witch* is a real evil film—everything about it is pure evil—there's nothing innocent about it, and putting your head in that kind of space for that long really messes you up."

Heart of Love, the lighthearted comedy that was supposed to be the filmmakers' second feature, was eventually abandoned because Artisan Entertainment was hung up on a *Blair Witch* sequel. (The one that was made in 2000, *Blair Witch: Book of Shadows*, without Sánchez and Myrick's involve-

ment, was widely panned.) Sánchez says he and Myrick want to revisit the series, but only under the right circumstances.

"It would've been cool to make a *Blair Witch* film every two to three years," he allows. "For us, the idea of doing a prequel—hardcore, in the snow, in Europe, hiring completely unknown European actors with accents, realistic lighting, realistic costumes, and with this little town being hit by witches—is a really cool idea."

Last year, the two even wrote a prequel treatment for Lions Gate Films (now owned by Artisan), but the company has yet to greenlight it. The filmmakers hope their solo projects will increase their credibility in terms of directing conventional, non faux-reality-style, features, which in turn will help get their *Blair Witch* prequel made.

"We're a little flummoxed by what the hesitation is," admits Myrick. "They'll put a bunch of money into *Jeepers Creepers 2*, but they won't do *Blair 3* with the *Blair* guys? It doesn't add up."

Dave Alexander



Eduardo Sánchez preps alien abduction film.



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Keene's *The Rising* to be adapted for film, comics and video games

The Rising, novelist Brian Keene's Stoker award-winning apocalyptic zombie story, is set for a slew of adaptations, beginning with a six-issue comic book series in the fall, and continuing with versions for film and video games.

"Never in a million years would I have thought this old zombie novel would take off the way it has," laughs Keene. "*The New York Times* had nice things to say about it, for Christ's sake!"

The critically-acclaimed book was originally released in late 2003, and gained popularity for its graphic violence and unusual twist on the zombie mythos, which expanded the scope of the outbreak to include animals, and gave the highly intelligent undead an otherworldly origin.

Keene himself will be penning the comic book retelling with Zac Atkinson (9-Volt Studios) illustrating. The author was first approached by IDW shortly after the novel's initial rise to popularity, but the publisher was already swamped with zombie properties, so no commitment was ever inked. It wasn't until Indie Gods Publishing (the company behind the reprints of Clive Barker's *Last Souls Magazine*), approached Keene late last year about optioning the rights that anything was cemented – and then only under the condition that Keene himself would write it. He says he plans to use the comic book adaptation as a means to correct the flaws he now sees in the novel, which was his first.

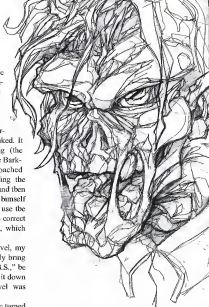
"Rather than just retelling the novel, my intention is to reimagine it – to really bring out the great parts, and cut out the B.S.," he says. "I'm going to be able to pare it down to the meat of what the novel was about."

Next year, *The Rising* will be turned into a video game, which developers are currently solidifying a "bible" for and creating preliminary sketches. Also tentatively slated for a late 2006 release is the much-anticipated film version.

"The first draft of the screenplay is done," he says, "and even though contractually I don't have script approval, the guys who are doing it are very cool and they keep me posted and keep me involved every step of the way."

Though Keene was unable to disclose the names behind the project at press time, he calls the screenplay "absolutely brilliant," and says that it remains very loyal to his source material.

"The gore is there and their school of thought is, 'Well, if the MPAA makes us cut it, we'll just save that for the uncut DVD version,'" he says. "The fans who really dug the gore in the novel will be pleased to hear that it makes it into the screenplay as well."



Creepy Comic: A glimpse at some early sketches by Zac Atkinson from the comic book adaptation of Brian Keene's *The Rising*.

The highly-anticipated sequel to *The Rising*, called *City of the Dead*, is slated for a June release date from Leisure Books, following a limited edition hardcover that sold out in a mere 72 hours. *City of the Dead* takes place in the heart of New York City, where humanity is making its final stand against the undead hordes.

"I think obviously zombie fans are going to dig it, but it actually pays homage to another fine horror film of the '80s and that's *C.H.U.D.*," Keene says. "The grand finale of the book actually takes place beneath New York, down in the sewers. I think the ending is going to leave people stunned."

Look for more updates on *The Rising* and *City of the Dead* on Keene's website at www.briankeene.com.

Monica S. Kuebler



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www.fat-pie.com

A collection of Flash-animated shorts by David Firth, featuring Solid Fingers, a sickly green denigrated creature who speaks in a polite though unfathomable creepy English accent, and harbours an unnatural obsession with stroking rusty spoons, caressing himself with nettles and killing things. Each disturbing episode is liberally flavoured with unsettling, atmospheric music.

www.darkofnew.co.uk

Graphic designer/illustrator Jordan Smith expertly uses Photoshop to manipulate gothic beauties, scream queens and classic monsters into his own macabre visions. His online portfolio provides a delightfully dark and deviant feast of images to swoon over

www.horror.org

The official website of the Horror Writer's Association (HWA) is swollen with novel excerpts, suggested dark reading lists and writing tips for aspiring genre authors of all levels. Here has a plethora of information for any horror literature enthusiast.

www.killerfonts.com

Killer Fonts have painstakingly created fonts based on the handwriting of some of the world's most notorious murderers (and other famous people). For less than the price of good tea, you can resign or send a love note in the now-immortalized script of Lizzie Borden or Jack the Ripper

bbogot.com/games/shrunken_heads

The British takes at Kowloon know that absolutely everything can be improved with a liberal dose of undead heads – for example, Tetris, the classic arcade game. Shrunken Heads gives it a wacky online twist, as the rusty rogues moan, grunt and groan as you make matches and lay waste to their hordes. ☠

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—compiled by Monica S. Reuber

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Barker, Gaiman and others join Voltaire for Deady



New York comic artist Voltaire has landed another round of high-profile collaborators for the next issue of *Deady: The Evil Teddy*, his ongoing series of graphic novels about, "a really adorable (but totally evil teddy bear)." Issue #3 features contributions from *Sandman* creator Neil Gaiman, as well as Roman Dirge (*Lenore*), Gris Grimly (*Wicked Nursery Rhymes*) and Crab Scramble (*The 13th of Never*).

"I had asked [Neil] about the possibility of a *Deady/Sandman* crossover since I'd love to see Death and Deady go for a hot dog, but copyrights being what they are ruled that out," explains Voltaire. "So he'll be doing an original story. It's Neil, so you know it's going to be absolutely amazing. And I get to illustrate it, which is a tremendous honour."

Voltaire already has worked with other top names in horror art and literature on the first two issues, including James O'Barr (on *Deady Meets The Crow*), famed manga artist Junko Mizuno and Clive Barker. Barker's original story *The Waiting Room* was a response to a *Hellraiser* spoof penned and inked by Voltaire, in which Deady encounters the "Stenobites" (PaperclipHead, Keyboard Mouth and Post-It Face), demons from Middle Management Hell who have "such PowerPoint presentations to show you..."

"I've been a big fan of [Clive's] work for a very long time," says Voltaire. "He

mentioned me in an interview on his website where he said some extremely kind things about my work. He also mentioned that he would be interested in collaborating with me on something. I nearly fainted."

Voltaire called Barker, told him about the *Hellraiser* parody he was working on, and asked if the writer wanted to respond to the send-up with his own piece. Barker thought the idea was amusing and agreed to participate.

Voltaire, musician and creator of the comics *Chi-Chan*, *Oh My Goth!*, *Humans Suck* and *Gbitz of Goth*, says the secret to nabbing such well-known guests is not being afraid to ask: "My philosophy about such things is that the answer is no until you ask, so really you have nothing to lose."

He's not afraid to send-up everyone from goths (like himself) to Hasidic Jews in the *Deady* stories, either. "I think that our culture has become politically correct to the point of denying the obvious," he explains. "Frankly, I celebrate the diversity of human kind – especially its myriad of foibles. I write about what I see, except that I add aliens and demonic teddy bears."

The *Deady* character was originally created as a "cute but edgy" T-shirt design, and then came the comic series (published by Sirius), followed by the toys (Toys2R) – all initiated by Voltaire. *Deady* is now the latest in a growing line of products directed at the teen goth market but collected by adults.

"There's a *Deady* plush in the works," he says, "and I would love to see a cartoon, but the trick is to find the right venue. I want to keep *Deady* kind of edgy, and I'm simply not willing to make it lame enough to be aired as a Saturday morning cartoon. Comics are easy; I can be as weird as I want to be and since there is so little money to be made, there is very little adult supervision."

For more of Voltaire's music, comics and animation visit www.voltaire.net.

Lilla Ladouceur



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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

+ It takes an hour and a half for a 180 lb. man to be burned to ash in a crematoria oven. These incinerators typically reach heats of 1,100 to 1,300 degrees F.

+ When King Pedro of Portugal was crowned in 1355, he exhumed the corpse of his mistress so that his subjects could properly honour her as their queen. Citizens were expected to bow before her body and kiss her dead hand.

+ A human body will typically decay four times faster in water than it will on land.

+ Mysophilia is defined as an abnormal attraction to filth, including "sexual arousal from soiled clothing or foul decaying odours."

+ Medieval Christians believed that cats were evil creatures associated with witchcraft, so they burned and slaughtered tens of thousands of the furry felines. As a result, the rat and flea populations – carriers of the Black Plague – surged and caused the disease to spread even more virulently.

+ If all the human body's natural defenses ceased at once, the bacteria in the gut would eat the body from the inside out in 48 hours.

+ Every day, humans shed approximately ten billion scales of dead skin. Calculated over a lifetime, this discarded dermas could weigh up to 40 lbs. and fill eighteen sugar bags.

+ In 19th century England, the collecting of shrunken heads became such a fad that counterfeiter in the Amazon would dig up the bodies of the poor and shrink their heads locally, sweatshop style. The modified melons sold for roughly \$25 per noggin'.

+ Researchers have discovered that when an insect dies in an outdoor bug zapper, it explodes, sending bug bits flying outwards up to six feet.

+ Khoona, a beverage believed to be a powerful aphrodisiac, is consumed by Afghan tribesmen on their wedding night. The drink is, in fact, comprised of a small amount of fresh, still-warm bull semen.

+ Bezoars, hunches of hair, vegetable fibers and food that form indigestible masses in the stomachs of both humans and animals were once believed to be magical and to function as an antidote to poisoning.

+ Headphones, when worn for an hour, will increase the bacteria in one's ear by 700 percent.

+ In 14th century Crimea, the Tartar army learned to use the bubonic plague as a battleground weapon, disease-ridden corpses were catapulted over the walls of cities held under siege.

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



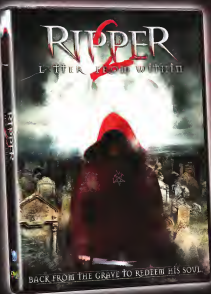
Instances of Necrophilia



1. **Aftermath**
Cold coastal Kodak moment
2. **Nekromantik 2**
Munk's stiff ride
3. **August Underground's Mordum**
Patrol pedophile penetration
4. **Haute Tension**
Head by severed head
5. **Dead Alive**
Undead supper table conception
6. **Dellamorte Dellamore**
Francesco's living dead liaison



—compiled by Monica S. Kuehler
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HER VICTIMS CALL HER JACK

Molly Keller remains a patient at a mental institution for the criminally insane after being locked up for going on a murderous rampage. She's psychotic and traumatized, both killer and victim... and a direct descendant of the legendary Jack the Ripper.

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ERIN KARPLUK (*Carrie*, TV's *Dark Angel*)

NICHOLAS IRONS (*Soul Assassins*, *Vlad*)

RICHARD BREMMER (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *The 13th Warrior*)

COLIN LAWRENCE (*X2*, *The 6th Day*)

ANDREA MILTNER (*Hellboy*, *Blade II*)



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RYAN STARR (*American Idol* Finalist)

JEREMY JACKSON (TV's *Baywatch*)

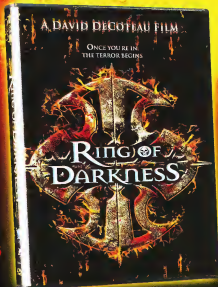


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the vampire slayer™

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Renegade filmmaker **JIM VANBEBBER** discusses his fifteen-year-long struggle to complete **THE MANSON FAMILY**, a brutal mockumentary that dares to shatter the illusion of one of America's most iconic murderers.

KILLING Charles Manson

by Rod Gudino Interview by Jovanka Vuckovic

In a case you've ever wondered, "underground cinema" is not just a cool term that refers to films that exist without a budget, without proper distribution or any of the comforts of the mainstream film industry. At its worst, underground cinema is an excuse for any hack job with a Camcorder to become his own personal Ed Wood. At its best, underground cinema is a violent affront to the sacred truths that form and define our cultural identity. Underground cinema exists for a reason, and that reason is to explore what the mainstream can never and will never show, even under the most excusing circumstances.

The Manson Family is such a movie. Written, directed and literally scraped together over fifteen agonizing years by renegade filmmaker Jim VanBebber, the film is a kaleidoscopic, postmodern mocku-horror that exposes the events and circumstances leading up to the so-called "Charles Manson murders" that ended the hippy era in a shower of blood.

A native of Dayton, Ohio, 41-year-old

VanBebber began experimenting with filmmaking at the age of eleven, amassing a collection of short films before finally making his mark on the festival circuit in 1994. The film was an award-winning short called *My Sweet Satan*, based on the true crime case of Ricky Kasso, a Satan-worshipping, drug-dealing teenager who killed an acquaintance in 1984 as an offering to the devil.

In 1997, the Fantasia Film Festival showcased VanBebber's first feature-length film, *Deadbeat at Dawn*, a '70s-style gang war revenge movie – made almost ten years before its release – that captured the attention of genre fans due largely to its balls-to-the-wall, gore-caked ending. That same year, VanBebber screened a rough cut of *The Manson Family* (then titled *Charlie's Family*) in the hopes of attracting would-be investors to complete the project. The rough cut had a profound impact on audiences and the unreleased film became notorious overnight, but VanBebber would have to wait six more years and move to Los Angeles before UK anti-video nasty activists David Gre-

gory (who also directed the documentary *VanBebber's Family*, see sidebar) and Carl Daft offered to help him finish the film once and for all.

The result is a movie unlike anything ever seen; gritty, raw, unbelievably cruel, it has scarred audiences and left the press stammering through reviews. "Have no illusions," remarked the BBC, "this is exploitation filmmaking at its most insane, deranged and unforgiving." Perhaps Roger Ebert put it best when he called it "an act of transgression so extreme and uncompromised... that it exists in a category of one film – this film."

A highly convincing pastiche of grainy interview footage, dramatic scenes and Satanic dream sequences, *The Manson Family* dares to include a shocking and virtually unwatchable recreation of the infamous Tate/La Bianca killings – every stab wound intact. No question, this is a film that is destined to decimate its audience.

Undoubtedly, some would accuse VanBebber of crossing a line that should never be crossed, but in an age when

"This is not Manson's family home movies"

or any of these other quasi-worshipping, play-into-the-myth movies. I'm trying to demystify Manson." **Jim VanBebber**

there is little difference between Charles Manson's image silkscreened onto a T-shirt and that of Freddy Krueger, it seems the time has come. *The Manson Family* demystifies one of America's most celebrated icons by focusing on the family itself, against whom Manson survives as little more than a frustrated musician and a relatively minor character in the story that has made him famous. Tellingly, the film is also book-

ended by a second story arc involving a fictitious new generation of Manson followers – a powerful comment on how the events of the late 1960s continue to have an effect today.

Rue Morgue spoke to VanBebber in January, shortly after the *The Manson Family*'s limited theatrical run in America, and in anticipation for the film's release on April 26 from MPI Home Video.

Where did the idea for *The Manson Family* come from?

[Producers] Mike King, Marcelo Gomes and I had formed Asmodeus Productions and we were finishing up *Deadbeat at Dawn* in the spring of 1988, and at that time Geraldo Rivera had a two-hour special on television called *Murder in America* and the entire special was his coveted interview with Charles Manson. And the way he portrayed Manson leading up to the interview and the interview itself – and even Geraldo's demeanor – was flabbergasting, just unbelievable sensationalism. Mike and I talked about it and felt it was a really fascinating case that says so much about America; and thought, "No one has ever really done a good film about what happened before they got arrested." I mean, we both had admired the TV-movie *Helter Skelter* starring Steve Railsback, but beyond that there was zero cinematic documentation. *Helter Skelter* really concentrated on the trial, and the focal point of that whole film was Vincent Bugliosi, the attorney. So Mike King looked at me and said: "Let's make a film about Charles Manson; we've got all this supposed money coming in from *Deadbeat at Dawn*, let's jump right into it." And we looked over at Marcelo, our partner, and something clicked. He had his hair long at the time and just looked so much like Manson, so we thought: "If we could just talk Marcelo into this." So we just dove into it stupidly. And once I got into it, I realized the vastness of what I was taking on. I mean, I really did my research. I knew on the first day of shooting that this was not just going to be some quick exploitation film. But I was just finding my path and we shot anyway and ran out of the seed money that we had

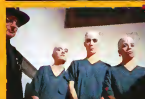
ended in November 1988, which is the curse of the entire film.

Exactly how many years did it take you to make the movie from start to finish?

From 1988 to 1991 we were shooting sporadically, raising money, shooting, showing potential investors what we had shot, getting more money, shooting more. And then, in 1992, I decided we had to take a break and make a finished project, a short, that we would show new investors because we'd pretty much tapped everybody out who kept giving us money for this thing that wasn't getting finished. We wanted to show potential new investors how we had grown as filmmakers, so I raised the money to make *My Sweet Satan* and we shot that in 1992. That won awards, it won first place at the first annual New York Underground Film Festival and Chicago Underground Film Fest the same year and we were able to raise more money for *Charles's Family* because of that film. Then I came up with the idea of the new "Charles cult" of kids to add to the film who go after Jack Wilson, who's our Geraldo Rivera, our Bill Curtis or whoever. So it was all shot by 1994, but it was just a lot of film in the refrigerator. Then we had to raise money to get that to the lab and process it and we had also lost our studio at that point so we had to raise money to rent a Steinbeck and cut it. It just went on and on and finally, by 1995, I had a cut on tape. So I showed that at *FanTasia 1997* in Montreal.

That's right, the infamous rough cut that generated a hell of a buzz.

Yeah man, it was a 1000 person sold-out



Family Album: Charles's disciples tell their side of the story in Jim VanBebber's kaleidoscopic, postmodern mock-horror on the so-called "Manson murders".



Messiah of Murder: Marco Gammas as Charles Manson. Opposite: An especially grueling moment from *The Manson Family*.

screening and it played at the Chicago Underground Film Festival that same year, which was where I met with Nacho [Aftershaft] Carda, who wanted to finish the film and come on as a partner, which is the reason I moved to Los Angeles. So Mike and I came to LA and checked out all the places Nacho wanted us to visit, the labs, the sound studios for mixing – everything was going great. We had signed a contract with him and all of a sudden it went belly up – I've never gotten the true story about what happened with that. In any event, I was back to square one.

But you forged ahead. What did you do next?
I directed a lot of music videos for Skinny Puppy, Necrophagia and Pantera.

Is that how Philip Anselmo got involved with The Manson Family?

Buddy Giovinazzo, the director of *Combat Shock*, is a friend of mine and at that point he had seen the cut that I had in 1994 and he said, "You should really meet my friend Philip, he loves *Deadbeat on Dawn*, he's into Manson, he'd really like this movie." So I said, "Yeah, sure, give me his phone number." So I called Philip and we started talking and it was obvious that we were on the same trip. I sent him my stuff and his criticism – the only one he had of me – was the music that I had always used in my films. I was like, "Look, I'm low budget man, I'm working with guys from Dayton, Ohio!" [Laughs] And Phil said, "Let me help you out." So it was a handshake deal; eventually lawyers stepped in but he started composing music right away. He was on tour with Pantera and the just struck him and that's Phil's nature; he's generous to a fault and such a true believer in the underground if something sparks his interest. All of that makes it harder to cope with all the bullshit he's having to

put up with following the tragedy of Dimebag's murder. It's staggering that it all came down to some unstable person projecting all kinds of madness onto an innocent human being.

Indeed, it's disturbing to think how many people are wandering around so close to snapping, and they walk among us. And it's a thought that's connected to the kids in the framing device of your film.

Oh yeah, exactly, great point! These are kids that have never met Charles Manson or anybody but they feel compelled to take it upon themselves to go kill Jack Wilson, who's going to make an interview special with the members of the Manson family, because they feel some kind of ownership of Charlie.

That bookend suggests that America's obsession with Manson is leaking across generations. How much of a reality is this in modern day America?

Well, look at [journalist] Nicholas Sarek, for crying out loud. I'm not saying that he's homicidal or I consider him to be – I think he's a big wimp – but look at his obsessiveness: he has a fucking framed lock of Charlie's hair somewhere in his house, he felt compelled to marry Zeena LaVey, he had his ear torn off... he's an asshole! These people are all around us, you know, it's scary. They're weak and they buy into people like Manson because they have a little charisma and a lot of attention paid to them.

Manson has really become a lot more than the sum of his parts, a phenomenon created by the media. Would you agree?

Oh absolutely! They drum incessantly, "Here's the boogeyman!" constantly reminding us that this guy is a monster and we should be afraid of

him and, in the process, they've created a superstar.

He's become an American icon, yes. Why do you think that's happened to Manson in particular?

Because he's intelligent, he recycles progressive '60s rhetoric really well and he also has a mean, unrepentant streak that everybody admires. Everyone admires somebody that sticks up for their guns. What do you say about the dude? I mean, smart people never fell under his spell, only people who were lost and looking for something.

Why do you think America is so obsessed with its serial killers?

[Sighs] I can only wonder. I look at the levels of fear that have affected me and the entire world since my teens. First you have AOS, which was the first big bomb, then the oncoming horror of corporate control and deceit. I mean, you can't trust anyone or anything anymore. Then there's the terrorists and 9/11 and so people retreat behind their computers and the internet – that fucking evil thing – it has created a society of people who sit in their basements in their underwear and tap-tap on their mouse. They don't get out, they don't interact, nobody lives life anymore. They get a thrill out of watching C. Thomas Howell play Kenneth Bianchi in *The Hills Have Eyes*. I don't know, I'm more confused than anybody!

A great deal of the power of *The Manson Family* comes from the look of the film, which is extremely authentic. What steps did you go through to obtain it?

I am so pissed you just said that. I just did a Q&A here in Los Angeles when it premiered out here and after the show there was this old guy who was an editor who worked with Robert Wise and his first fucking question was, "How did you obtain the real footage?" That's the reaction I was hoping for! It was all preplanned [by] carefully looking at film and research, sitting down with Mike King, my cinematographer, and saying, "Okay, back in the day on the nightly news they didn't have videotape, they went out and shot film, so what kind of film did they shoot?" Mike did his research and he found out they used VNF 7240 reversal film and they shot with Frezolitris – that was the preferred camera of Los Angeles newsmen – so we went out and got a Frezolitris. We got VNF 7240, which was no longer being produced, but we found some guys who had some in their freezer! You know, we had to do it this way, it all lent to the authenticity of the film. Anyway, it's reversal film, so I'd get back the positive and take a piece of cheesecloth, fill it with kitty litter and then drag the film through it physically with my hands, scratch the shit out of it, send it back to the lab and say, "Print that!" [Laughs]



Helter Skelter

Version 2.0

THE MANSON FAMILY

Starring Marcelo Gomes, Marc Pitman and Leslie Orr
Written and Directed by Jim VanNebber
MPI Home Video

"You make art, you put it out there.

People will ignore it, love it, hate it, kinda like it, it doesn't matter — that's not why you make films."

Jim VanNebber

Your technique is almost genius in its simplicity!

Nah, I'm just doing what Orson Welles did with *Citizen Kane*. It's a technique that's a hell of a lot better than some joker shooting something on a DV cam and using a fucking computer to generate scratches and hair — it makes me want to puke my guts out. I've got the eye, I can see through that shit, it's gotta be real, man. I think those little details work on you subconsciously, from wardrobe to the body shapes of the people. I mean, we don't have LA hard-body buff actors in the film, we cast real people.

It's clear you were trying to portray things as they really were, but in an age of media saturation and myth-making, how did you go about obtaining any sense of truth about these events?

Research. I read everything, and not just the books. This was before the internet so I was working my ass off getting a hold of old magazines that had interviews with Bobby Beausoleil and pictures of him so I could replicate the tattoos he had in prison. It was sitting down and going, "He said this but I don't trust him and she said that and I believe part of her story." It was almost like a documentary and I say that because no fucking documentary in the history of cinema is objective. They're all subjective, because they're made by the documentarian. They sit there and take their raw footage and decide what's good and what's not and they give you their version of reality. A documentary is just

another film made by a filmmaker, so I took the same approach. The story filtered out through me; this is my subjective look at all the material that the media had given me and I worded it right back at them.

I hear you deliberately avoided interviewing the Manson family members, is that because you figured they were a bunch of liars?

Pretty much, yes. They change their tune from year to year if they think they have a shot at getting out, with the exception of Beausoleil and Manson, who've never repented at all. Beyond that, I have no desire at all to be a fucking pen pal to some people who have killed people. I have no respect for anybody who takes a human life. This movie is not Charles Manson Superstar, this is not Manson's family home movies or any of these other quasi-worshipping, play-into-the-myth movies. I'm trying to demystify Manson, I'm trying to show how the situation led to one violent event that led to another because they were isolated and paranoid — it's almost like *Dominoes* tipping over. That's not that hard to understand, but then you've got Vince Bugliosi traipsing in with *The White Album* [laughs] and all this shit and it kind of pollutes the water. I mean, he wants to be Sherlock Holmes!

A lot of your actors were not actors; how did you get such convincing performances out of them?

Actually, everybody who got in front of the camera had, at one point or another, done some act-

torific murders notwithstanding, my long-held and deeply entrenched hatred of hippies impels me to give Charles Manson props for contributing so precipitously to the decline and fall of the Woodstock nation. Still, I do find it a bit peculiar that popular culture has long since transformed Manson — like Jack the Ripper before him — into some superhuman, mythic force of nature, even though in terms of body count neither of them holds a candle to Gary Ridgeway or John Wayne Gacy.

Furthermore, while Manson continues to leer out at us from T-shirts, television and book covers more than 30 years after celebrity prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi sent his crazed ass off to San Quentin forever, his followers remain a largely faceless bunch to all but the most dedicated true-crime junkies.

Hence, much of the charm of Jim VanNebber's microbudget opus *The Manson Family* derives from its presentation of Bobby, Sadie, Tex, Linda, Squeaky et al as fully-realized, three-dimensional characters, each with a history and a distinct place in a volatile, constantly-shifting hierarchy. These, after all, were the outcasts who actually committed the murders (depicted here in excruciatingly graphic detail), and while they did so on Manson's orders, the spectacular brutality with which they carried out their mission was largely their own.

Of the sundry Manson films (good, bad, and all points between) we've witnessed down the years, none before *The Manson Family* has ever satisfactorily examined the conflicts and tensions that plagued the group and, in some ways, led to its downfall. In particular, the tricky dynamic of Tex Watson and Bobby Beausoleil makes for a fascinating subplot in which two hardcore alpha males, while remaining loyal to their boss, compete to control the women.

The Manson Family suffers from a wraparound story that doesn't always work. Still, the writing is sharp, the violence shocking and the performances surprisingly strong for what is, in the end, an extremely ambiguous and effective lo-fi project.

John W. Bowen

19 RUE MORUEUX



Massacre Moment: "I'm trying to show how one violent event led to another," says VanDyke

ing. Even though they're not professional actors they had done community theatre or college theatre; it wasn't like I was just taking somebody off the street. I started making films when I was eleven and I had totally worked with non-actors through a lot of those years. I don't know exactly how I did it except that I am a very good mimic and I know what I want and I can act it out for the cast if they need that help. But every one in *The Manson Family* were local actors.

With the exception of Marcelo [Charlie], right?

Right. Marcelo had done some acting for me in some of my student films, but we got him to really believe in this and he's a very intelligent man. Once he got his head around it, he went for it, and I thought he was very good.

He was very convincing, but he did not see the project through to the end. Why is that?

We all thought we were going to make a lot of money off *Deadbeat* but we didn't. When I met Marcelo in the Wright State University Film Department, he, Mike King and I were like the Three Musketeers. We incorporated as Asmodeus Productions, we made *Shattered* - Mike's movie - then we made *Doper*, then *Deadbeat*. So we've been together a long time and we really thought we were the three sides of the triangle in the logo of our company. But *The Manson Family*

kept stretching on and Marcelo kept with it 'til about 1980 then he wanted a turnaround - he grew up in a way that Mike and I didn't. He looked at his own film and thought that it wouldn't translate into Hollywood and starting questioning himself the way that we all do in our late '20s, and so we split amicably and went our separate ways.

What role did drugs play in the making of the movie?

The murder scenes were done absolutely sober - they had to be. You couldn't have an actor subjected to that kind of torture while high. Even though they were using a retractable knife, it's still uncomfortable to be poked with repeatedly. Every time drugs did come onto the set, it was a conscious decision. For scenes where people really needed to be freaky, like the dog's blood orgy scene and the afternoon orgy, copious amounts of marijuana, LSD and alcohol were consumed. Marijuana and alcohol were present throughout most of the shoot, actually, but when things got heavy, like Hinman or Tate or Kerner [killings], that was all done dead sober. It's a method directing sort of style but that's one of the great freedoms of independent cinema.

The murders in your film are extremely graphic and detailed, with the exception of one. Why

did you choose to not show the Sharon Tate killing?

Sharon Tate being murdered is the reason we are talking right now. She was a Hollywood starlet married to Roman Polanski, it was front page news and then the thing that became even bigger than the victims were the victimizers - crazy Manson and all of his rhetoric and crap. One she's the focal point. Two: it's totally overkill by that point, I believe in pacing. Three: I love Roman Polanski, I always have. I'm a huge fan of him and his films. There's no reason to rub his nose in this anymore.

Who did the practical FX?

It was pretty much all me. Bill Farmer came in from Columbus to do our squibs on Steven Parent when he gets shot in the car, and Andy Copp did Sharon's belly. But other than that it was pure Tom Savini-inspired genius. He should be called Thomas "Edison" Savini! He was a huge influence on how I pulled off the effects in my movie.

We've heard from several sources that, over the past 15 years, you've gone a little mad as a result of your efforts to get this movie made. Would you care to comment on that?

[Pregnant pause] I dunno, this film was my priority. It did give me blinders and I did have tunnel vision because I took it so passionately.

You give new meaning to the phrase "putting your own blood, sweat and tears" into a movie. You sold pints of your own blood to finance it at one point, didn't you?

Well yeah, but you gotta do what you gotta do. This was my dream. I know that there were a lot of points throughout this entire odyssey that seemed hopeless, but I had to keep going. Let me put it to you this way: I felt like I was on a ship and everybody's rowing and we're crossing the waters and we're getting to our destination and then all of a sudden the food runs out and Malaria strikes and this car ain't going and that car ain't going and you begin going mad and pretty soon it's only me and the first hand. Everybody else has jumped ship, and then my first hand jumps ship! Then I'm running around to all these cars trying to steer and go forward all by myself. You can make what you want out of that.

Tell us how you finally got *The Manson Family* finished.

I was here in Los Angeles, I'd done some music videos and I had dealings with David Gregory and his label called Exploited. He had tried to put out *Deadbeat* in the UK and the BBFC [British Board of Film Classification] banned it. He ended up releasing it anyway on video. Eventually he moved to LA and he started working for Bill Lustig [Blue Underground]. I was out here



PHILIP H. ANSELMO discusses his unsettling score to Jim VanBehber's shocking mockumentary.

Murder Music

by Jovanka Wackovic

Anyone worth their weight in heavy metal is familiar with Philip Hansen Anselmo. Of course, he's best known as the ear-shredding vocalist of Pantera, Down and Superjoint Ritual, but Anselmo has also lent his brutal screams and guitar talent to a variety of lesser-known but much more evil projects, including Necrophagia, Christ Inversion and Elbon (as Anton Crowley), to name a few.

Anselmo recently upped the ante on his rap sheet with his unusual score for Jim VanBehber's long-awaited mockumentary *The Manson Family*. In addition to scoring most of the film, Anselmo's demonic throat also provides the voice of Satan. Being that his collection of genre films exceeds 1000 titles, it's no surprise that Anselmo's lifelong interest in the occult and underground horror cinema led him directly to VanBehber.

"I had read about Jim through the underground film magazine *Film Threat*," Anselmo told *Rue Morgue*. "I was familiar with his work; I own *Deadbeat at Dawn*, *Roadkill*, *The Last Days of John Martin* and *My Sweet Satan*. I'd say it was pure destiny that we met, having so many common interests."


After meeting in 1994, Anselmo offered to help VanBehber score *The Manson Family* and, eight months later, churned out an unconventional, occasionally deranged, hippy-era serenade that lends itself to the authenticity of the

film and the nightmarish, psychedelic imagery that saturates it. For the task, Anselmo defaulted to his own childhood memories of growing up in the French Quarter of New Orleans during the late '60s.

"My memory is very vivid," he reveals, "and, of course, I remember the melodic acoustic guitars, and my parents' friends who were in the hippie mode — long-haired and smoking pot. [While working on the score] I listened to the music of the times, which definitely included the Beatles, and with the Beatles there was no escaping the topic of Charles Manson. So in a way, it was easy to rekindle those memories."

Though the music for the movie's "contemporary" scenes was later furnished by Dwayne R. Goettl, Devin Key and Anthony Valic of Download, Anselmo scored the majority of the "period" section, using several of his many side projects — Body And Blood, Southern Isolation, Superjoint Ritual and The Disembodied — with the end result being that when you're not listening to Bach or Manson's own music in the film, you're pretty much hearing Anselmo. And unlike his last genre credit (an unused score for H.G. Lewis' *Blood*

Faust 2: A/U Can Eat, see *RM#29*), Anselmo is happy with the results.

"What is so interesting is that Charles Manson was not a serial killer," he says. "From his Rasputin-like glare, to his shaved head and unforgettable swastika in the middle of his forehead, Manson made his presence known worldwide, not just in America. He became the world's poster child for the age group of his followers; so young and seemingly bright, but naive. I think the events affected American culture so greatly because the 'Manson Family' was American. To journalists around the world this was front page stuff, news to shock. No matter how un-factual or factual the 'journalism' may have been, it put Charles Manson's face on the cover of everything, and it was snatched up. It still is today. As for other serial killers, mass murderers, etc., it's the well-known work of the media. Human-on-human brutality sells, period." 



"What is so interesting is that Charles Manson was not a serial killer".

Philip Anselmo

Family Values

THE VAN BOBBER FAMILY

Starring Jim Van Bobber, Marc Pitman and Mike King
Written and directed by David Gregory
Blue Underground

Just when you think you've heard all the tall-but-true tales of the trials, tribulations, triumphs and terrors of independent filmmaking (horror and otherwise), along comes Jim Van Bobber to raise the bar for determination, dedication and sheer otherness.

Although I'm a sucker — now, let's admit it, a nerd — for making-of documentaries, there are only a few to which I'd ascribe the cliché "painfully honest", and director David Gregory's 77-minute movie is one of them. He captures the likable VanBobber, beer in hand, becoming more hideously hammered by the minute. The renegade filmmaker guides us through *The Manson Family's* tortuously long, disaster-plagued production history, which is interspersed with additional narration from cast and crew.

With surprising candor, the Dayton, Ohio expatriate recounts how he and his cronies, flush with hubris after several early lo-fi successes, embarked on an ambitious project to factually retell the story of the Manson murders while simultaneously demythologizing Manson himself, only to learn too late they were dangerously out of their depth. For Van Bobber, however, determination turned to obsession, even as his own film began eating him alive. As production ground to a halt, the filmmaker moved to LA, became treated on finishing the project and dove headlong into poverty, depression and self-destructive behaviour for over a decade. Thanks to the intervention of two British producers who saw an earlier cut of the film at a festival, his steadfastness eventually paid off, with *The Manson Family* finally released to reviews ranging from ecstatic to scathing.

The traumatic birth pains of Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and, for completely different reasons, *House of 1000 Corpses* are legendary among industry types and fans alike. And while *The Manson Family* is unlikely to reach so wide an audience, VanBobber's own story is every bit as harrowing and, ultimately, inspirational.

John W. Bowen



Killer Cut: "Sharon [is being murdered] is the reason we're taking," says VanBobber (and inset) the director relaxes

dropped on my ass by Nacho [Cerdas] and David and I began hanging out around 2001. Then he and his partner offered to help me finish *The Manson Family*. It took them a while but they did it and I'm not surprised because they are the guys who fought the battle royale against the BBFC to get *Last House on the Left* released in Britain. They spent thousands of British pounds and lost in the end, but they were making an important statement, they were really doing something for killing censorship in Britain, which was almost Victorian at the time. In true Manson family fashion it took forever, but David did everything he said he'd do — the blow-up, the 5.1 surround sound mix, giving me time to make my sound logs and all that shit — and we got it done. Those guys are awesome.

Have you been contacted by any of the Manson family members with regards to your film?

Not yet, but I think they know better. I'm smarter than they are, and more cynical.

Yeah, you could probably talk your way around those people.

I could outtalk Charlie. He's not as smart as everyone thinks he is. He's used to people being afraid or coming up to him wringing their hands in sympathy.

He's not even a terribly good musician!

Actually, I like his music. I think he's really original in some of those songs. I really like *Lie*, I put it in about every four months and groove on it. I'm willing to look at little Charlie for the musi-

cian inside him. Music has always been the most important thing to him, it's his one peaceful thing that he's good at. I groove with him on that level just like I groove with Bobby Beausoleil's music. His soundtrack to [Kenneth Anger's] *Lucifer Rising* is one of the most incredible compositions I've ever heard in my entire life. I put that against Wagner, Beethoven, Bach and everybody. Listen to track three, please, then call me back.

What has the response to the movie been like so far?

A good barometer is this theatrical release we've had in the US with wildly divergent reviews. The best, ultimately, was Roger Ebert — he's an icon of American film critics. Roger's review was the best because you could tell that this movie pained him so much that he sat awake all night, he got a phone call at 5 AM reminding him about his deadline and he's like, "I don't know what I thought!" It's the most "I don't know what I'm thinking" review I've ever read. To me it was the perfect review. He gave it three stars yet he's questioning why he even gave it three stars. What do you say? You make art, you put it out there, people will ignore it, love it, hate it, kinda like it, it doesn't matter — that's not why you make films.

What's next for you?

I'm developing two scripts right now. I'm not sure how much I want to say because I learned my lesson the hard way, you know; I was telling people *Deadliest At Dawn* was gonna be done in 1986 [laughs]. That's story of my fuckin' life! ☹





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"It started as a twisted dream"... 25 years ago in a small town in New Jersey called Lodi. It was there in April of 1977, at the dawn of the punk movement, that the Misfits were born. Taking the title of Marilyn Monroe's last movie as their name in a move to immortalize her image. Making history and creating a legacy that's power has not only stood the test of time, but transcended into an entirely new generation.

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Decades before Roger Corman and H.G. Lewis were menacing buxom women with mutants, monsters and madmen, publishers in the 1930s were doing the same thing. These dime-novel tales scandalized North America for a decade before finally being chased off the shelves. This is their story.

THE

TALE OF THE LATE GREAT SHUDDER PULPS

by
Don
Hutchison

Pulp fiction. It's not just the name of a Tarantino flick. Back in the days of bread lines and hobo jungles, millions of readers found escapist thrills in the pages of cheaply-produced magazines printed on rough pulpwod paper. Known as "the pulps", these all-fiction titles catered to every imaginable reading taste from detective yarns to pirate stories, from jungle adventures to science fiction and even romance. But the wildest of them all were the notorious horror tomes known collectively as the shudder pulps.

The so-called "shudder" or "weird menace" titles were a blood-red splash of colour in the grey days of the Great Depression. They announced their monthly wares with circus poster-style covers featuring voluptuous underdressed beauties pursued by hordes of leering lunatics as bent as

boomerangs. Their promise: cheap thrills, and plenty of them.

In the nightmare universe of the shudder pulp; it was always a dark and stormy night. Tethered damsels suffered in the clutches of mad surgeons, warped scientists, and masked cultists, eagerly abetted by legions of demented dwarfs and horny hunchbacks. They stripped, whipped, and boiled their curvaceous victims with the enthusiasm of medieval inquisitors. Even the requisite rock-jawed heroes of these stories suffered a purgatory of horrors in order to rescue the fair maidens.

Like the dependable full moon, each month the shudder pulps announced their presence with covers illustrating in chromatic detail the titillating promise of stories like *Flesh For The Goat Man*, *The Corpse Wants Your Widow*, *Food For The Fungus Lady*,

Mate For The Thing In The Box, and *Summer Camp For Corpses*. If the author's title wasn't explicit enough, the editors helped them out, incorporating key words like "dark", "pain", "terror", "unholy", "death", "devils", or "corpse" — though few could top Frederick C. Davis' inspired *The Mole Men Want Your Eyes*. And if you think the folks at Full Moon were originators of the title *The Dead Hate The Living*, think again. A writer named Wayne Rogers dreamed that one up nearly 70 years ago for his yarn in the January 1936 *Horror Stories*.

Whether or not the shudder pulps revelled in perverse sex or merely suggested it with leering immundos and lurid illustrations is debatable. In the decade before their introduction the venerable *Weird Tales* magazine published a story titled *The Loved Dead*, written by C. M. Eddy, Jr. (with a little help

Through the fog-choked greyness these horrors prowled.
Their faces were pale as the fog itself and even knives could
draw from them no blood. Yet it was blood they sought,
blood that they sucked from their victims' headless corpses!

Men Without Blood by John H. Knox
(*Horror Stories*, January 1935)



from his ghostwriter pal H. P. Lovecraft), which contained at least one direct reference to the necrophilic activities suggested by its title. Eddy claimed later that citizens' groups in several communities had the issue (May/June/July 1924) banned from newsstands. While his claim is doubtful, *The Loved Dead* was not the kind of story that the pulps, much less *Weird Tales*, actively encouraged. Cannibalism was okay, sex was not.

The truth is that for all their sex-and-sadism notoriety, the shudder pulps adhered to a single basic requirement: the reader must be entertained at all costs. It was a time when working class people sought escape in fantasy, so as a rule, the more preposterous

the fantasy world created, the easier it was to forget one's own problems. It was a Shakespeare but it was great storytelling. As the

late, great fantasy author Karl Edward Wagner described it: "No pretensions of art — just go for the throat. An old dark house, a mad fiend on the loose, and twisted benches on hand, beautiful and barely clad girls being tortured, a two-fisted hero to the rescue, plenty of heaving alabaster bosoms and mangled bodies, mile-a-minute thrills and pulse-pounding action..."

The shudder pulps had their genesis in *Dime Mystery*, the first of this new breed of fiction mags that lurched onto newsstands in October of 1933. It was the brainchild of Popular Publications' resourceful young publisher Henry Steeger, a graduate of Princeton University and the University of Berlin. In late 1929, when Steeger was in his mid-20s, he borrowed money and, with partner Harold Goldsmith, started the Popular Publications pulp chain. At first the partners had only four titles — a western, two detectives, and an air war — but by the 1940s they were running the biggest pulp publishing house in the world.

Steeger was the company's idea man. He instituted a sassy, extravagant style for their fiction and developed an instinct for cover art that bordered on genius. Even his story titles mixed sensationalism with dry wit: *You're The Crime In My Coffee*, *The Corpse Belongs To Daddy*, and *This Is The Way We Bake Our Dead*. A chance remark, a joke, anything could suggest a new title which would be rushed into print.

As fads came and went, new magazines sprang up while others disappeared. When *Dime Mystery's* detective pulp failed to take off after a dozen issues, Steeger realized he'd have to revamp it to attract new readers. Inspiration struck him during a trip to Paris when he attended one of the notorious shock plays



of Le Theatre du Grand Guignol in Pigalle — a theatrical company that horrified audiences with live productions featuring explicit depictions of torture, mutilation and bloodshed.

Its founder, Oscar Metenier, a playwright of the naturalist movement, pioneered the idea of turning the public's secret fascination with the morbid and bizarre into an art form. He was, as cinema's goremeister Herschell Gordon Lewis once acknowledged, "... progenitor of all the blood-spilling, eye-gouging, limb-hacking, blood-bust boiling just under the surface of apparently civilized human beings... a marvelous mirror image of our basest instincts."

As canny publisher, Steeger perceived literary possibilities in the transformation of Grand Guignol gore into pulp; he lightened the brew with the addition of another European influence: the Gothic novel. A phenomenon of the late 18th Century, Gothic literature was a movement that focused on imperiled heroines, demented villains, death, terror, decay, and a pervasive atmosphere of supernaturalism. Passion overcame reason in these novels, and such settings as isolated, storm-swept landscapes with crumbling castles and subterranean labyrinths formed their backgrounds. Steeger reckoned that if he could encourage his stable of authors to combine the visceral appeal of Le Grand Guignol with the spooky sensibilities of the Goths, he could come up with something new.

Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* (see Classic Cut) is generally

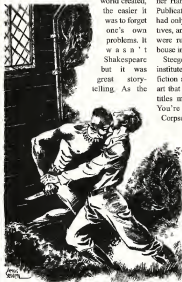


ILLUSTRATION BY AMOS SEWELL FROM *THIRST OF THE LIVING DEAD* PUBLISHED IN *TERROR TALES* (1934).

70 years after they disappeared from store shelves, these hard-to-find, twisted tales are once again being resurrected.

SHUDDER PULPS: THE SECOND AGE

Shudder pulps may have been regarded as trash in the 1930s by the moral majority, but today they're minor treasures for collectors. Like the outcry over EC horror comics, moral outrage eventually stripped the shelves of the racy books, and as a result, they've become extremely rare, fetching as much as \$800 US for a decent issue of *Terror Tales* #1.

Enter Grisol Collectables, the brainchild of Canadian brothers Leigh and Neil Mochem. Now in their early 40s, the brothers discovered pulp fiction as teenagers, got hooked on reprints, and eventually channeled their love for the lurid into the Grisol Pulp Replicas, whose premise is to produce faithful facsimiles as close as possible to the glorious originals.

"There have always been pulp reprints of varying quality," Neil Mochem told *Rue Morgue*. "But it seemed that the time was right in terms of available technology and printing processes to make a more 'pulp-like' reprint."

Over the years, many collectors have expressed interest in the pulp experience of magazines such as *Weird Tales*, *Spicy Mystery*, *Terror Tales*, and *Horror Stories*, complete with all of the ads and typos, but without the cost, flaking paper, or occasional musty smell of some of the originals. To that end, the Grisol replicas—an inventory that includes more than 50 different issues with three new reprints every month—are scanned directly from the original pages, as are the covers, with no alterations whatsoever, though considerable retouching has gone into the covers in an attempt to restore the vibrant look of the original books.

Visit www.grisolcollectables.com and see The Grisol Pulp Replicas for yourself.

Don Hutchinson



considered to be the first Gothic novel, but it was Ann Radcliffe's popular *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) that was most influential in designing the shudder pulp formula. Radcliffe made clear her distinction between the terms "terror" and "horror", saying that terror is induced by anticipation of some fearful happening, and that horror is in the culmination of that event.

Her chief contribution to the formula, however, was the manner in which she intimated supernatural terrors in her stories, only to explain them away as the handiwork of some calculating human plotter. Dedication to this idea became the most outrageous aspect of the wildly improbable shudder pulp stories, and one guaranteed to test even the most inventive writers.

October of 1933 saw a relaunch of Henry Steeger's ailing *Dime Mystery Book* under its abbreviated title, *Dime Mystery*, and bearing the subtitle *The Weirdest Stories Ever Told*. Gone were the old-fashioned whodunit stories, replaced by the publisher's newly-invented shock genre. The magazine's lead tale went to pulp pro Norvell Page. His novella, *Dance Of The Skeletons* asked, "Who was the Flesh Destroyer? How could a living man become a meatless nightmare—in two short hours?" The answer involved Manhattan

party-goers eaten by piranhas. Page's story was a moderate beginning, but set the tone for greater horrors to come.

Inflused with new blood (literally), the revamped *Dime Mystery* took off. Encouraged by its success, the magazine's authors sped recklessly past the borders of reality in describing the sheer magnitude of villainous crimes. Many of pulpdom's most prolific tale-spinners like Hugh B. Cave ("master of the vivid phrase"), Ray Cummings, Arthur Leo Zagat, Paul Ernst, Nat Schachner, Wyatt Blassingame, and Arthur J. Burks churned out tasty tidbits like strings of Sweeney Todd sausages.

Readers responded with relish, and Popular Publications soon produced not one, but two companion monthlies, *Terror Tales*, followed by *Horror Stories*. There was little difference between the titles, despite a hefty fifteen-cent price tag on *Dime Mystery*'s two companions. They were, in essence, a single magazine published three times a month, indicating the almost instantaneous popularity of pulp fiction's new fright face.

Thick with atmosphere, weird menace yarns usually stuck to 20th century settings but paid homage to Gothic storm-lashed nights, Stygian caves, and other cryptic locations (ruined castles, however, were



replaced by the old dark houses of early '30s movie thrillers). Common settings included remote mountain villages, forested hamlets, and other off-the-beaten-path locations.

Interest continued to grow, and soon other publishers rushed in with similar books. Chief among imitators was publisher Ned Pines, whose *Thrilling Mystery* was a clone of *Dime Mystery*. Typically flashy titles like *When Death Comes Crawling* accompanied superb cover art by Rudolph Belarski, which advertised megalomaniacs like giant spiders, grinning gorillas and living skeletons. Soon, more publishers waded into the fray with titles like *Ace Mystery*, *Eerie Mysteries*, *Eerie Stories*, and *Spicy Mystery*, published by Harry Doremfield (later the founder of DC Comics) and Frank Arner under the risible brand of Culture Publications.

In the copycat world of the pulps, nothing succeeded like excess, and newcomers tested the limits of sensationalism. Publisher Martin Goodman (later the creator of Marvel Comics) attempted to out-horror the competition with his grisly Red Circle pulps *Uncanny Tales* and *Mystery Tales*. Writers were instructed to go for the throat, and such shock effect treats as *Lovely Bodies For The Butcher*, *The Claw Will Come To Caress Me*, and *Yield, Lovely Maidens To The Blood Master*, brought fresh meaning to the term sadomasochism.

Of course, it didn't take long to reach the breaking point. Like comic books would later experience in the 1950s, the pulps came under hostile scrutiny. The heyday of the weird menace titles had coincided with the Golden Age of Hollywood's horror movies, and despite the popularity of such films, by the mid-'30s studios were hesteged by the anti-horror sentiments of various civic groups.

In Britain – which constituted over 40 percent of the all-important foreign distribution market – outcry resulted in the British Board of Film Censors calling for an outright ban of the Hollywood horror product. After a few half-hearted releases in 1936, studios shut their doors to hoogeymen in favour of family comedies, musicals and action movies.

Having won the cinema wars, public do-gooders looked elsewhere for their moral outrage – and found it close to home. They discovered that the most condemned of the horror movies, Todd Browning's bizarre *Freaks* and Edgar Ulmer's version of *The Black Cat*, with its themes of necrophilia, sadism and satanism, were shadows of what could be found at their local newsstands.

When New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia threatened to rid his city of sex-and-sadism magazines, publishers reacted in fear

It was the soul of Hell's Courtesan which spoke in that old bell – shrieking her midnight summons of lust and madness to the man and maidens of Westmoorland... Were all in the village condemned? Would none escape the dreadful, compelling call? Curt Stannard prayed that the girl he loved would be spared – and then he saw upon her white arm the brand of the Mad Children of Satan!

The Coming Of The Mad Ones by Frederick C. Davis
(*Dime Mystery*, September 1936)



of losing newsstand sales as well as their US postal mailing privileges. As shudder pulp stalwart Bruno Fischer described it, "clean up organizations started throwing their weight around and gave editors jitters, and artists and writers were instructed to put panties and brassieres on the girls."

Unfortunately, in discarding key ingredients of their appeal, the magazines suffered. And with the coming of World War II in 1939 the extent of human madness and misery could no longer be viewed – much less enjoyed – as mere fiction.

Soon thereafter, *Dime Mystery* was retooled as a straight mystery magazine. *Spicy Mystery* soldiered on for awhile but was then retitled *Speed Mystery*. *Terror Tales* and *Horror Stories* were shut down in 1941. Pulp fiction's bloody reign of terror had ended, not with a bang but with a whimper.

And yet, even after the long silence that followed, the shudder pulps remain, kept alive by collectors from all over the world. Pulp authority Robert Kenneth Jones best expressed the shudder pulps ongoing appeal: "Weird menacism unfurled all the appurtenances of mystification: bizarre, seemingly unexplainable deaths, ghost-like creatures, and frightening fiends in a Gothic setting of dreary houses, dark caves, dank forests, of devil cults and demonic evildoers, of heroes under dire threat, and heroes pitted against seemingly hopeless odds. There is nothing to equal their wild improbability today. Our present fiction may have smoothed some of the rough edges, but in doing so, has thrown out some of the excitement that once kept readers on the edge of their chairs." ☞

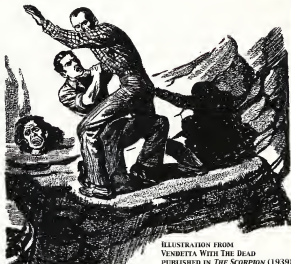


ILLUSTRATION FROM
VENDETTA WITH THE DEAD
PUBLISHED IN *THE SCORPION* (1939).

What would the pulps be without the lurid covers and bright colours that spoke of the lip-smacking horrors inside?

SHUDDER ART

On the crowded and fiercely competitive newsstands of the 1930s, it was the covers that helped magazines stand out from the crowd.

While Popular Publications' three horror 'zines used the talents of such top flight illustrators as Rudolph Zirm, Tom Lovell, and Walter Baumhoffer, it was the work of ex-landscape painter John Newton Howitt that defined the look of the shudder pulps and enticed new readers to their unique pleasures. His mad masterpieces of cover art not only emblazoned scenes from authors' stories but were often fevered creations of his own imagination. A gentle soul by nature, Howitt was reportedly embarrassed by his own skill and ingenuity in devising such tableaux of torture and depravity. He later destroyed all his pulp paintings.

For several years all black and white interiors for the big three horror pulps were handled by artist Amos Sewell. Like Howitt, Sewell was a first-rate illustrator who was able to turn out work quickly for the demanding pulp market where speed and reliability were prime assets. The average issue of *Terror Tales* sported half a dozen or more Sewell dry-brush illustrations, one for each story, portraying author-described scenes of horror, bloodshed and sadism.

Even though cover artists were able to portray the most depraved scenes of torture and humiliation of women, full nudity was out. While they routinely portrayed buxom lasses in various degrees of undress, it was a case of titillation without nipples. In the world of newsstand magazines, nipples were verboten. A single display of fully-equipped breasts could get your magazine seized and the publisher charged.

Curiously enough, interior illustrator Sewell was under no such handicap. He was particularly adept in the portrayal of attractive full-figure female nudes, even though a number of them appeared to be disappointingly deceased. A master of macabre art, Sewell abandoned the shudder pulps in the late 1930s to work for the prestigious *Saturday Evening Post*, where he became famous for his family-friendly cover paintings featuring cute and cuddly children – with nary a whip or boiling cauldron in sight.

Don Hutchison

COVER PAINTING BY RUDOLPH W. ZIRM
PUBLISHED IN *TERROR TALES* (1934).



SPICY MYSTERY 25c

for JUNE



Novelette of Eerie Terror

In all the desolate Northland waste there was no other haven for Philip Rollins and his young bride. Yet death in the making would have been better than the terrors which lay in wait for them, in that bottomless hell that spawned its ancient tortures . . .



ILLUSTRATION BY AMOS SEWELL PUBLISHED IN *TERROR TALES* (1934).

SEQUENTIAL PULPS

TALES FROM THE CRYPT:

FROM COMIC BOOKS TO TELEVISION

Narrated by Simon Amstein

Directed by Chip Selby

CS Films



By 1950, the sensational style of the pulps made its way into comic book format when William M. Gaines' infamous EC Comics applied the pulp story to the panels and jacked it up with more violence and horror than the public was able to handle. A new documentary titled *Tales From the Crypt: From Comic Books to Television* briefly chronicles the controversial history of the coolest comics ever made.

As colorful and slickly produced as the comics that inspired it, Chip Selby's DVD documentary is sadly less a study of the rise of EC Comics, and their eventual fall at the hands of a hysteria-prone public than an extremely belated extended commercial for the sometimes-great, sometimes-not television series it inspired.

Considerable attention went into the presentation in terms of style and substance. There's a wealth of archival material, interviews with surviving major contributors, as well as those whose careers were inspired by them (John Carpenter, George Romero, and, more despicably, Goosebumps author R.L. Stine). But there's little offered that's news to anyone with even a passing knowledge of sequential art's troubled history.

The segue into *Crypt's* resurrection as an HBO series in 1989 is more suspect, with only cursory mention of the 1972 Amicus film that was first to exhume the title. More disturbingly, the total lack of reference to less-successful *Crypt* theatrical ventures *Demon Knight*, *Bordello of Blood*, the project that would eventually become *The Frighteners*, or the kiddie-fied *Tales From The Cryptkeeper* cartoon show, reeks of convenient historical revision.

The true lasting value of *Tales from the Crypt: From Comic Books to Television* is contained in its bonus features (collectively three times longer than the main program) which include an indispensable round-table discussion between EC writer/editor Al Feldstein and frequent adapter Ray Bradbury (JMA32) at Bradbury's home. It's worth the \$29.99 USD plus shipping and handling for this fly-on-the-wall style interview alone. Available online only at www.cryptdvd.com/purchase.htm.

Joseph O'Brien





Meet **BOB TYRRELL**,
the Basil Gogos of tattoo art.

NIGHTMARES IN BLACK, GREY AND **BLOOD**

BY JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

When you think of horrific fine art, images by Hieronymus Bosch, Francesco Goya, Theodore Gericault (*RMM44*) and contemporary painters like Joe Coleman (*RMM39*), Mark Ryden (*RMM38*) and H.R. Giger (*RMM2*) all materialize in the dark gallery of the mind. But how about tattoo art? Thanks to the enduring effort of pioneering Western artists from the '70s, tattooing—once the ultimate alternative art form—has finally been elevated to the realm of fine art.

Today, courtesy of modern horror tattoo artists like Paul Booth (considered the patriarch of sinister tattoo art), Robert Hernandez, Shane O'Neill and, of course, Bob Tyrrell, the weird, wicked and macabre are making their way under the third layer of precious skins globally, rendered with the precision and craftsmanship of fine art dignitaries and well-respected highbrow painters.

"Skin art is sort of known as a rebellious art form," Tyrrell told *Rue Morgue* in a recent interview, "and so is horror; they've both traditionally gotten a bad rap. But it's all just fine art to me, so what could be cooler than horror-related tattoos?"

Tyrrell and his ilk have successfully synthesized the two misunderstood art forms, imbuing them with a horrific beauty that commemorates and celebrates the very things this magazine is about—darkness and fear—and you don't have to be a tattoo enthusiast to acknowledge and appreciate its nightmarish elegance.

A superlative portrait artist, Tyrrell specializes in monochromatic portraiture and creepy monsters—a style that echoes the chiaroscuro horrors of Expressionist cinema and the early Universal films. His remarkable ability to render the human (or monstrous) image into the living flesh canvas has earned him worldwide recognition

and a legion of awards in his mere seven and a half years of tattooing. Though not exactly where the Detroit native thought he'd find himself at age 42, there is no better place for this lifelong horror fan and consummate artist to be.

"When I was seven-years-old I discovered *Famous Monsters of Filmland* at a newsstand," Tyrrell recalls. "The year was 1969; on the cover was a painting of Lon Chaney from the lost film *London After Midnight* by the almighty Basil Gogos. I flipped out and begged my mom to buy it for me, which she did. I bought every single issue after that. That same year she also bought me a subscription to *Creeper*."

From that point on, Tyrrell continued to seek up as much horror as he could in all of its forms, counting John Carpenter's *The Thing* and *The Exorcist* among his all-time favorites. Artistically his influences range from fantasy artist Frank Frazetta to the legendary Gogos, as well as tattoo artists like Paul Booth, Robert Hernandez, Guy Aitchison and portrait artist Tom Renshaw.


Not surprisingly, the images of Chaney, Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi that haunted Tyrrell's childhood psyche made their way into his art. After spending many years playing guitar and working a "dead-end job," he was inspired to return to his creative roots after he got his first tattoo (Iron Maiden mascot "Eddie") at the late age of 30.

"I always wanted to be an artist when I grew up, like my dad," he says. "After getting my first tattoo, I got back into drawing monsters again, regressing back into my childhood overnight. I'm still regressing!"

The experience eventually led him to quit his day job and pursue an apprenticeship at Eternal Tattoos in his hometown. Just three months into his training (which can typically take a year or more), Tyrrell had already begun tattooing and successfully achieved his childhood dream of being a visual artist — via the conduit of a left-handed tattoo machine depositing ink at a rate of 2200 times per minute.

Tyrrell now owns a private studio in Detroit, aptly named Night Gallery, wherein hang his own exquisite pencil renderings of that influential image of *London After Midnight*'s dagger-toothed Lon Chaney, *Heckle's* Pinhead, *The Monster Club*'s fanged Vincent Price, and many other enormous illustrations that horror aficionados request to have deposited into their dermas.

Whether or not you ever decide to commit your own body to the enduring art of tattoo, we welcome you to gaze upon the macabre flesh treasures in Bob Tyrrell's Night Gallery....

Visit Night Gallery online at www.bobtyrrell.com. 



"SKIN ART is sort of known as a rebellious art form and so is **HORROR**; they've both traditionally gotten a bad rap. But it's all just fine art to me, so what could be cooler than horror-related tattoos?"

BOB TYRRELL





HERE IT IS: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO ALL THE BEST **HORROR HAPPENINGS** AROUND THE WORLD...

The Definitive 2005 Horror Convention Schedule

March 4-8



TRANSWORLD'S NATIONAL
HAUNTED ATTRACTIONS SHOW
Wholesaler's Convention
(not open to the general public)
Rosemont, Illinois
www.transworldexhibits.com

April 1-3

CINEMA WASTELAND
Drive-In Era Movies and Memorabilia
Cleveland, Ohio
www.cinemawasteland.com

Reel Fear THE FILM FESTIVALS

Looking for more than autographs, toys and collectibles? Cinephiles and horror movie junkies look no further!

February 21-March 7
FANTASPORTO 2004

Porto, Portugal - www.fantasporto.online.pt

March 11-26

BRUSSELS FESTIVAL OF FANTASY FILM
Brussels, Belgium - www.biffi.org

April 1-3

CHICAGO HORROR FESTIVAL
Chicago, Illinois - www.chicagohorrorfest.com

April 21-24
DEAD BY DAWN

Edinburgh, Scotland - www.deadbydawn.co.uk

July 1-21*

FANTASIA FILM FESTIVAL
Montreal, Quebec - www.fantasiefestival.com

September 9-18

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL:
MIDNIGHT MADNESS
Toronto, Ontario - www.e.bfi.ca/filmfest/

September 15-18
SHRIEK FEST

Hollywood, California - www.shriekfest.com

September 23-25

SHOCKERFEST
Modesto, California - www.shockfest.com

October 7-9

THE H.P. LOVECRAFT FILM FESTIVAL
Portland, Oregon - www.hpfilmfestival.com

April 2-4

FRIGHTVISION
Nostalgia, Memorabilia & Collectors Expo
Cleveland, Ohio

www.frightvision.com

April 8-11

WORLD HORROR CONVENTION
Horror Lit Expo, New York City, New York
www.whc2005.org

April 22-24

HAUNTCOM
National convention and tradeshow
for haunted attraction and Halloween
industries.
Dallas, Texas
www.hauntcon.com

April 29-May 1

CHILLER THEATRE
Toy Model and Film Expo
East Rutherford, New Jersey
www.chillertheatre.com

May 13-15

**THE FRIDAY THE 13TH 25TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**
Los Angeles, California
www.necrocomicon.com

May 20-22

MONSTER-MANIA CON 3
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
www.monstermania.net

June 4-5

DAYS OF DARKNESS
Burbank, California
www.creationent.com/cal/dod.htm

June 24-26

MONSTER BASH
International Classic Monster Movie
Convention and Expo
Butler, Pennsylvania
www.creepyclassics.com/bash.html

July 14-17

COMIC-CON INTERNATIONAL
San Diego, California
www.comic-con.org

July 29-31

FLASHBACK WEEKEND HORRORAMA
DRIVE-IN AND CONVENTION
Rosemont, Illinois
www.flashbackweekend.com

August 3-5

TWISTED NIGHTMARE WEEKEND
Middleburg Heights, Ohio
www.twistednightmareweekend.com

August 19-21

HORRORFIND WEEKEND
Hunt Valley, Maryland
www.horrorfindweekend.com

August 26-28

**RUE MORGUE
FESTIVAL OF FEAR**

Toronto, Ontario
www.rue-morgue.com/festival.php

August 26-28

MONSTER-MANIA CON 4
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
www.monstermania.net

September 30-Oct 2

CINEMA WASTELAND
Drive-In Era Movies and Memorabilia
Strongsville, Ohio
www.cinemawasteland.com

October 6-9

ROCK AND SHOCK
Monsters, Music and Mayhem
Worcester, Massachusetts
www.rockandshock.com

October 28-30

CHILLER THEATRE
Halloween Expo
East Rutherford, New Jersey
www.chillertheatre.com

*Date(s) subject to change

October 10-18

**THE HOLLYWOOD HORROR SCI-FI AND FANTASY
FILM FESTIVAL**
Hollywood, California
www.hollywoodwards.com/homehtml

October 20-23

**RHODE ISLAND INTERNATIONAL
HORROR FILM FESTIVAL**
Rhode Island, New York - www.film-festival.org

October 26-31

CINEMUERTE VII
Vancouver, British Columbia - www.cinemuerte.com

October 26th

NEW YORK CITY HORROR FILM FESTIVAL
New York, New York - www.nyohorrorfest.com

October 26th

SCREAMFEST
Hollywood, California - www.screamfestla.com

November 6th

SIFGES FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL
Catalonia, Spain - www.sifges.com





R.I.P. 2004

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The old year is dead: now it's time for *Rue Morgue's* list of all the horrible things we loved and the even more horrible things we hated about it. Plus, we've added new categories to stake the fire. Read it and creep.



BEST FEATURE FILM
Shaun of the Dead

BEST INDEPENDENT FILM
Dead and Breakfast

BEST SHORT FILM
Dad's Dead
Written and directed by Chris Shepard

MOST INNOVATIVE CONCEPT
Open Water



MOST FRIGHTENING FILM
Open Water

BEST (NEW) KILLER
Jigsaw (*Saw*)

BEST DEATH SCENE
Texas Chainsaw Massacre
(guy on hook)

GORIEST SCENE
Any chapter stop on
August Underground's Mordum

BEST SCORE
Donnie Darko: The Director's Cut

BEST POSTER
Saw (promotional)

BEST BOX SET
Universal Monster
Legacy Collection
(Universal)

BEST FILM YOU DIDN'T SEE
The Manson Family (MP)

WORST CINEMATIC ATROCITY TO WOUND YOUR RETINAS
TE:
Exorcist: The Beginning
Van Helsing

BEST FICTION BOOK
The Rising,
by Brian Keene
(HarperCollins
Canada)

BEST NON-FICTION BOOK
Ray Harryhausen:
An Animated Life
(Aurum Press)



BEST COMIC BOOK
I Am Legion:
The Dancing Faun
(DC/Humanoids)

BEST COMIC BOOK ARTIST
Breehn Burns,
Aleister Arcane (IDW)

BEST GAME
The Suffering
(Midway)

MOST ANTICIPATED FOR 2005
George Romero's
Land of the Dead

LEAST ANTICIPATED FOR 2005
House of Wax

MOST NEEDFUL THING
Limited Edition Santi
With Bomb Statue
(Sideshow
Collectibles)

BEST COMEBACK
Tobe Hooper,
Toolbox Murders

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT
The Grudge



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SEEN IN A LONG WHILE."**

— FILM THREAT

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AND IT SUCCEEDS!"

— *filmthreat.com*

"LEAN, MEAN AND DESTINED
FOR CULT STATUS"

— *Winston-Salem Journal*



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- Commentary from Director Stevan Mena
- Deleted Scenes - Trailer - Radio and TV Spots

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CINEMACABRE



Darkness: Silly and clichéd yet oddly affecting.

SPANISH SHADES OF GREY

DARKNESS

Starring Anna Paquin, Lena Olin
and Giancarlo Giannini
Directed by Jaime Balagueró
Written by Jaime Balagueró
and Miguel Tejada-Flores
Dimension

Make no mistake, *Darkness* is a silly film choked with genre clichés and stolen scares, yet there's something genuinely dark and nasty wrapped inside all that ridiculousness, something that is oddly affecting, perhaps because of those very flaws.

X-Men's Anna Paquin stars as Regina, a teen whose family moves into an old house with a 40-year-old secret involving a cult of child killers trying to summon a great evil. Her father, despite being involved in the crime as a boy, somehow misses the fact that he's moved into the same house again and spirals into paranoid delusions while uncovering old fiends hidden in the walls. Regina tries to hold the fam' together while investigating the house's past, but it's tough

when Mom (Olin) ignores her demands to move, younger brother draws spooky pictures and sees ghosts, and grandpa (veteran Italian character actor Giancarlo Giannini) knows more than he's letting on. Add a prophetic eclipse, an ominous stranger spouting exposition, Giallo-style overacting and telescoped plotting, scares cribbed from *The Shining*, *The Exorcist* and several Polanski movies, and *Darkness* collapses under its outlandish lack of originality.

However, in that pile of rubble something unsettling survives. It's hard to put a finger on it, but somewhere between director Jaime Balagueró's sooty, claustrophobic style (sometimes compared to that of David Fincher) and the unexpectedly bleak ending that lives up to the film's title, an unseemly develops that lingers after the credits roll. Much of it has to do with being unprepared for the finale (that, dammit, should've come much

sooner), because the preceding mediocrity and presence of a Hollywood starlet develops a false sense of viewer security about the film's ability to disturb. It just doesn't seem that *Darkness* should have the balls or hilt of its last ten nightmarish minutes when expectations of a clean resolution literally fade to black.

That subtly unnerving atmosphere and narrative blindsiding in Balagueró's earlier cult/sensational horror-thriller *The Nameless* (based on the Ramsey Campbell novel and unlike this Spanish import, wasn't re-edited for North America), is much more successful. Track down a copy and watch that film instead. But don't turn your back on the critically maligned *Darkness* entirely, because there's something disturbing hiding in its dark little corners that you may want to discover for yourself.

Dave Alexander

MUCH ADD ABOUT COMPARATIVELY LITTLE

TOM SAVINI'S CHILL FACTOR EPISODE ONE: HOUSECALL

Starring Bingo O'Malley, Marianne Nagel
and Jason Hoehn
Directed by Tom Savini
Written by Jeff Moreahan
Chill Factory

One could complain that horror makeup effects guru Savini's new direct-to-DVD series flies in the face of expectations, but I'm actually kind of impressed for that same reason. It's not that the episode in question—an unassuming little vampire number with a switch ending you can almost see coming—is particularly earth-shattering, 'cause it ain't. Rather, it's a well acted and eventively shot period piece involving a distraught mother summoning a doctor to her rural digs one stormy night to treat her teenage son, who's convinced he's become a card-carrying undead bloodsucker.

While the doctor is initially unconvinced and the mother undecided, flashbacks reveal that the kid,





Chill Factor: Puzzlingly restrained.

who's suitably remorseful over his nocturnal neck-nosing, is actually telling the truth. There are some cool moments, including one shot that references *The Exorcist* so ham-fistedly as to result in your humble scribe spraying Jack Daniel's out of his nose (an excruciatingly effective method of clearing the ol' nasal passages).

Still, given that the series was developed by the Grand Poobah of Gore, who engineered the effects in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, *Friday the 13th*, *Maniac* and many other splatfests over the years, hardcore fans will find this first episode a puzzlingly restrained affair. Yes, there's blood, but a only few rivulets dripping down nubile female bodies and the inevitable stake-fest idiosyncratic to vampire films. Want disemboweling? Disemboweling? Facial shotgun blasts? Better go spelunking through Savini's back catalogue, because you won't find any spectacular splatter here.

This time out, Tom's all about the atmospherics, and while I'd hate to see him abandon gratuitous gore altogether, I find it interesting and inspiring to see an established horror icon step outside his own repertoire, even when the results are only fair-to-middlin'. The one real downside is

the brevity of the episode – only 25 minutes, but padded with extras including interviews with Savini and *Fangoria's* Tony Timpane, along with a making-of doc. Apparently, future installments will feature two episodes, but given that this debut resembles a just-slightly-above-average *Outer Limits*, the pickings are a tad slim.

John W. Bowen

COULD THE TITLE BE ANY MORE APPROPRIATE?

THE FORGOTTEN

Starring Julianne Moore, Dominic West and Anthony Edwards

Directed by Joseph Ruben

Written by Gerald Di Pego

Sony

I saw the PG-rated, pseudo sci-fi chiller *The Forgotten* during its theatrical spin on a Friday night and almost came to blows with a nosy gaggle of post-pubescent teenage weenies sitting in front of me. After I laid down the black leather law with the bothersome brats, they eventually quieted the fuck down and I realized their incessant yammering was probably more entertaining than the woefully wrong-headed film onscreen. Yup, *The Forgotten*, though not an outright bad movie, is yet another frustrating example of a Hollywood film that simply lacks the courage of its convictions.

It's a damn shame because the movie begins beautifully: housewife Telly (the ravishing Julianne Moore) is still reeling over the death of her young son when something right out of *The Twilight Zone* happens: all evidence that the kid ever existed is mysteriously erased. Even her husband (*Pet Semetary 2's* Anthony Edwards) denies they ever had a child. Just as Telly begins to believe she is indeed losing her marbles, she and hunky co-star Dominic West stumble across evidence of a cover-up. It seems someone or something is messing with the minds of mankind, removing people and the memories of said people from the face of the earth. Is Telly's son

actually still alive somewhere? Are malevolent aliens involved? Is ET's finger glowing? Damn straight!

What starts as a tense, paranoid, supernatural psychological nail-biter, stylishly set up by director Joseph Ruben (*The Stepfather*), quickly devolves into yet another lame-ass chase picture, with *Matrix-y* G-Men running all over town trying to put the kibosh on Telly's desperate investigation. Along the way there are a number of jolts, but by the time the big, stupid, completely ridiculous excuse for a climax rolls 'round you'll have long ceased to care. The film's saving grace? The luminous Moore, who is so good, so convincing and such a genuinely attractive actor, that you can't keep your eyes off her – when they're not rolled back in your disbelieving brain, that is.

Chris Alexander

THE FAT LADY'S SINGIN'

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Starring Gerard Butler and Emmy Rossum

Directed by Joel Schumacher

Written by Andrew Lloyd Webber

and Joel Schumacher

Based on the story by Gaston Leroux

Warner Bros.

Andrew Lloyd Webber is to opera what Simple Plan is to punk rock, Maxi Priest is to reggae, Shania Twain is to country and

Chris Alexander is to manhood. Webber's the Mozart of mediocrity, the Beethoven of bland, and a shallow, giftless dilettante whose hackneyed McOperas are an embarrassment to the art form. And as much as I loathe his entire pedestrian oeuvre, *The Phantom of the Opera* in particular appalls me as both a horror fan and a music lover, since Gaston Leroux's

tale – not only a classic of horror literature but also one of the all-time great tragic love stories – could have reigned supreme as an opera or musical had it been adapted by someone with a shred of talent.



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The Phantom of the Opera: An embarrassment to the art form.

The news that this operatic abortion was being brought to the screen, by Joel (gag – *Batman and Robin* – retch) Schumacher initially caused me no small amount of butt-clenching, and yet he acquits himself surprisingly well. Sure, there's eye candy aplenty, but never at the expense of credibility or period authenticity. Hey, it coulda been worse – it coulda been Baz Luhrmann. Webber, who also produced, insisted the actors must actually be able to sing (admittedly admirable on his part), but the casting is weirdly uneven. On one hand, in the role of Christine we have Emmy Rossum, a jaw-droppingly beautiful ingénue with a superb voice, and Minnie Driver, who steals every scene she's in as spoiled diva Carlotta. On the other hand, while Gerard Butler lays on the anguish convincingly as the titular boogeyman, he's about as threatening as David Cassidy and can't sing worth dog shit.

But let's face it, the main offender here is the music. Had the film been directed by Martin Scorsese and starred Plácido Domingo

and Renee Fleming, the saccharine score would still ensure intolerable sucktade. I can only take solace in knowing the horrors that await Andrew Lloyd Webber in the afterlife: a Rodney King-style beat down from Lon Chaney, Mozart, Verdi and Wagner, followed by eternity in Music Hell as Linda McCartney's keyboard roadie. (John, you have a black, black heart. -Ed.)

John W. Bowen

JUST STATIC

WHITE NOISE

Starring Michael Keaton, Ghania West and Deborah Kara Unger
Directed by Geoffrey Sax
Written by Niall Johnson
Universal

The first theatrical spookshow of 2005 explores the dubious theory of EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomenon): the belief that the dead can communicate with the living through recordable audio and video transmissions) and tries to scare the bejesus out of viewers still in love with the ghostly chills of *The Sixth Sense* and *The Ring*. Surprisingly enough, it actually works on a knee-jerk level, despite some major story problems and a moronic performance by Michael Keaton, in his first major role since 1998's *Jack Frost*.

Keaton plays Jonathan Rivers, a man who loses his wife in a freak accident and reacts to the tragedy the way he would to losing a goldfish. Shortly thereafter Rivers is confronted by a stranger who claims to have been contacted by his deceased wife from the other side. After hearing her voice

through a static-filled transmission and receiving a few phantom cellphone calls, Rivers is convinced and soon turns his back on his professional career and son to spend his days recording his very own EVP. When he realizes that not all the people he's making contact with are dead, the mystery begins.

While EVP might be an interesting concept to explore in a horror film, *White Noise* presents it in the dumbest way possible. Apparently, anyone can hear and see the dead by hooking up their TV to the stereo and pushing record. Stiff, saddled with a weak script, director Sax (*Dr. Who*) manages to save the film using the J-horror staples of perpetual darkness, long periods of silence, distorted TV images, and of course, static. The result is a seemingly endless series of cheap, superficial scares that, even though you know they're coming, will have your hair standing on end. With no plausibility to the story whatsoever, EVP skeptics can rest at ease; *White Noise* won't make a believer out of anyone.

Aaron Lupton

STRINGS ATTACHED

MARRONNIER

Starring Mayu, Misao Inagaki and Hiroto Nakayama
Written and directed by Hideyuki Kobayashi
Tidepoint Pictures

Horror and comedy are uneasy cinematic bedfellows. Let's face it, the majority of chuckles provoked by chillers are unintended. How many times have you rented a fright flick hoping to be scared to death, only to die laughing?

This is not to say that humour has no place in horror. What's supposed to follow the scream after all, but catharsis? That self-aware snicker when the lights come up – "Hey, I'm still alive!" – is the expected result after a good creepshow. Problems arise, though, when the filmmaker can't balance the gore with the giggles, and Hideyuki Kobayashi stands guilty. The founder of Koganemushi Scarebee, a Japanese puppet theatre troupe, is ostensibly taking the piss out of too-serious J-horror with *Marronnier*, his blackly comic debut feature. It's too bad the result is unfunny and beholden to the clichés it's trying to parody.

Marino (Mayu) loves her Marronnier doll, a cutesy but vaguely sinister thing that's all the rage among grown women. What she doesn't know is that its creator is a madman who cranks the highly-prized

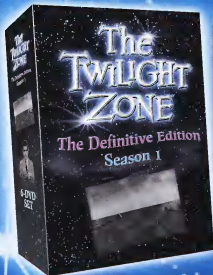


White Noise: A dumb look at the electronic voice phenomenon.



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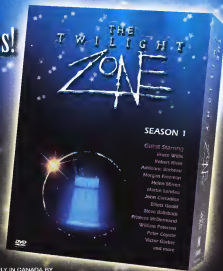
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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED THIS ISSUE: LANCE ON LANCE HENRIKSEN!

LANCE AMOT?

LOST VOYAGE

DEJ Productions

Remember the movie *Ghost Ship*? Remember how badly it tanked? Well, grab a life jacket, kiddies: things are about sink a lot deeper because the cruise ship *Corone Queen* has returned after being lost in the Bermuda Triangle for the last 25 years! A team of ghost hunters and a salvage crew, including Lance Henriksen and Judd Nelson, are sent to investigate and find themselves caught in a time paradoxical trap with light shades of *Event Horizon*. On the upside, Henriksen has a great death scene à la *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, plus his marlin tattoos finally make some sense.

Body Count: 11

Lance's Screen Time: 13:58

Lance's Best Line: "Don't make me cut your fucking tongue out!"

HARRY AND THE HENRIKSEN

SASQUATCH

Columbia Tri-Star

Also known as *The Unlost and Inexpensive*, this Bigfoot bomb makes *Harry* and the *Handcuffs* seem downright terrifying by comparison. Henriksen plays maverick CEO Harland Knowles who's searching for his daughter, following a plane crash. He's also looking for a prototype DNA machine that will save his company. Unfortunately, the *Sasquatch* — who looks like Homer Simpson in an ape suit — wants the machine as well (what the-?). Lance tries hard in this *Predator* meets *Blair Witch* rip-off, but in the end he can't avoid looking like a monkey.

Body Count: 8

Lance's Screen Time: 28:20

Lance's Best Line: "Come on, you goddamn ape!"

INCREDIBLE SHRINKING LANCE

ANTIBODY

DEJ Productions

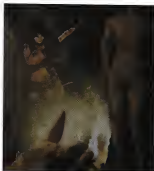
I guess we were about due for a remake of *Fantastic Voyage*, and since *Interzone* didn't cut it, why not give Lance Henriksen a call? Pesky terrorists have been blowing stuff up again, so former FBI agent Dr. Richard Gaynes (Henriksen) gets a call to disarm a nuclear bomb. The catch? It's buried in the terrorist leader's brain, so our hero must shrink down ("go subhuman") and pilot a mini-sub to get at it, all while battling white blood cells. Filmed in Bulgaria for about, oh, \$3, *Antibody* should only be viewed with a doctor's prescription and a shield of Jägermeister.

Body Count: 30

Lance's Screen Time: 27:53

Lance's Best Line: "I don't have time for this shit!"

Last Chance Lance



Marronnier: Bizarre but incompetent.



mannequins from the bodies of his victims, whose flesh he turns to wax. His assistant, Numai (Nakayama), is even crazier, and wants to turn his would-be beloved Marino into a doll herself. Then the *Marronnier* dolls come alive... or do they?

I'd reveal more, but then I wouldn't have as much room to bitch. *Marronnier* didn't paralyze me with fear, nor was I wracked with paroxysms of laughter. Kobayashi, who wrote, directed and edited this travesty, has little talent in any of those arenas. His characters are one-dimensional, his scenes end abruptly, and his direction is uninspired.

What *Marronnier* does have going for it is the director's self-conscious enthusiasm. Like an accidental Ed Wood, Kobayashi — working with a budget seemingly scraped together by sciling his belly button lint — offers up some truly bizarre imagery and outrageously incompetent plotting. Famous manga artist Junji Ito (*Uzumaki*, see *RAM 39*) executive produced and designed the titular dolls (which, with wide eyes and porcelain skin, are surreal and sensuous). Why he'd associate himself with this trash, I don't know. Now that's both scary and funny.

Sean Plummer



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REISSUES

SYNTH ROCK REANIMATED

HARD ROCK ZOMBIES (1984) DVD

Starring E. J. Curio, Jennifer Coe and Jack Bliesener
Directed by Krishna Shaw
Written by David Allen Ball and Krishna Shaw
Blue Laser Films

Sometimes the gods punish, sometimes they reward, and sometimes they display a perverse sense of humour by unleashing movies like *Hard Rock Zombies*. Before delving into the surreal madness of this musical horror-comedy, however, know that the title is a misnomer. They should've called it *Soft Rock Zombies* or *Synth Rock Zombies*, 'cause the soundtrack is half-past Journey's ass, quarter to Foreigner's balls terrible. You've been warned...

The film stars real-life rocker E. J. Curio (whose slightly successful '80s band Silent Rage was produced by Gene Simmons and opened for Black Sabbath) as Jesse, leader of a rock band preparing for a big gig in the backwater town of, sigh... Grand Guignol. Unfortunately, the rock 'n' roll-banning townies don't take kindly to tight pants-wearing longhairs, and chuck the foursome in jail.

Upon release, they're slaughtered by a family of maniacs, but not before Jesse falls in love with a local girl of about fourteen and records a song with the power to reanimate the dead. She resurrects the undead bangers (now wearing King Diamond makeup), so they can avenge their deaths, play the gig, and thwart a full-blown zombie outbreak (of about ten extras).

The film's lighting is terrible, direction amateur, editing delusional, acting unspeakable, homage to *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* unscrupulous, and music video-style montages hysterical. But that just makes things delightfully surreal when you've also got a virgin sacrifice,

werewolf granny, zombie in spandex doing interpretive dance, Hitler (Jack Bliesener) plotting to take over the world, and Curio's stunning Chewbacca mallet. Not enough? Okay, how about a Peter Jackson-style scene where Hitler's undead mutant midget grandson eats himself, and a scheme to fight zombies with posters of rock stars' heads? It's relentlessly silly and deliriously inept, but hardly ever boring.

The man responsible for this lunacy is Krishna Shaw, who co-wrote, directed and produced. He's also directed Broadway plays and dramatic Indian films, and produced most of the *Sleepaway Camp* series – which may explain the disjointed weirdness. Unfortunately, and appropriately, the *HRZ* DVD is a full-frame joke with no extras and a dirty print. That said, witness the stunning insanity of *Hard Rock Zombies* immediately or incur the wrath of the gods!

Dave Alexander

HAMMER HISTORY PARAGON

FLESH AND BLOOD: THE HAMMER HERITAGE OF HORROR (1994) DVD

Written and directed by Ted Newsom
Narrated by Christopher Lee
and Peter Cushing
Image

What can I say about legendary UK film factory Hammer that hasn't been said a billion times over by wiser writers? Hammer arguably stands as the single most influential production company in the history of horror. At the very least, they broke major cinematic taboos with their use of blood-red colour and cleavage-revealing corsets.

Being a lifelong devotee of the studio (especially their early output, in particular the work of Terence Fisher), I've read enough Hammer biographies

to sink the Bismarck, and I've seen enough half-baked documentaries to melt my corneas. But never have I witnessed such an affectionate, thorough and thoroughly entertaining exposé as Image's new DVD release of Ted Newsom's 1997 history lesson *Flesh and Blood: The Hammer Heritage of Horror*.

Charting the early days when producer Anthony Hinds was just finding his footing in cheap black and white potboilers through to the studio's first experiment in full-blown colour with *The Curse of Frankenstein*, and on to their declining years with stuff like the *Run Run Shaw* co-production and *Seven Brothers Meet Dracula*, *Flesh and Blood* is the entire history of Hammer as told by both the people behind the scenes and the fanboys who credit the studio with making them who they are today (Joe Dante is both a talking head and associate producer).

Plus, the film is narrated by the velvet-voiced Christopher Lee and (culled from earlier interviews) the late Peter Cushing. Exploring the effect Hammer had on American studios like AIP (which



Lust for a Vampire: Rutie Stensgaard strikes a classic pose

they would later partner up with on some of the raunchier output), and even going so far as to do a micro examination of the Roger Corman Poe films, is a classy touch.

As an added bonus, the film digs up primo home movie footage from the set of 1966's *Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness* that features Lee and cast prepping for the big Drac ice death climax. You may have seen some of this stock as supplements on Anchor Bay's long out-of-print release of the film, but here it's presented in its entirety with narration and original audio. Fans will eat this disc up, but even non-horror fans will find the near Shakespearean rise and fall of a once thriving, historically invaluable movie business, fascinating.

Chris Alexander

HIT 'N' MISS DOUBLE BILL

FADE TO BLACK (1980) DVD

Starring Dennis Christopher, Linda Kerridge and Tim Thomerson

Written and directed by Vernon Zimmerman

HELL NIGHT (1981) DVD

Starring Linda Blair, Vincent Van Patten and Peter Barton

Directed by Tom DeSimone
Written by Randolph Feldman
Anchor Bay

Sometimes, when I'm not feeling like a motherless child, I feel like a one-man target marker, and this is one of those times. I came of age at the very end of the drive-in era and as a result, thematically-packaged B-horror reissues rarely fail to push my nostalgia buttons. Tonight's double bill consists of a hit and a miss.

Lonely Browncoat Misfit Finally Snaps

And Kills People - say, there's a fresh concept. Unless you count *Taxi Driver*. Or *Carrie*. Or *Terror Train*. May and (insert a dozen more titles here), not to mention their real-life counterparts, those crazy kids at Columbine High.

Meet *Fade to Black*'s Eric Bonford (Dennis Christopher), a lonely film nerd eeking out an existence delivering reel cans and posters around Hollywood while

living vicariously through classic movie characters. After falling hard for an Australian Marilyn Monroe look-alike (Linda Kerridge) and enduring sundry abuse at the hands of various stock bully types including Mickey "Dude, where's my career?" Rourke, Eric concludes his one-way trip around the bend with a rather unremarkable killing spree; each murder a reenactment of a famous movie scene.

The film is reputed to have a sizable cult following, who will no doubt rejoice over this re-release after such a long wait, but I don't include myself in that number. It's not terrible by any stretch, but could've been - nay, should've been - a damn sight better.

Tonight's second feature under the stars, *Hell Night*, hails from yet another crowded canon: College Pledges Spend Night in Allegedly Haunted Mansion For Initiation, one of the poorer cousins in the extended family of Dead Teen pics. Initially, my enthusiasm for this viewing experience could scarcely be measured under a microscope, but Editor-in-Chief, bona vivante and benevolent despot Rod Gudino assured me that this one has long ranked among his favourite dumb-ass horror films, right up there with *Humanoids From the Deep*, and he'd have reviewed it himself were it not for some pressing editorial commitments (I smell racquetball).

Given that Señor Gudio has seldom steered me wrong, I plowed ahead, and while *Hell Night* scarcely holds a candle to the lowbrow, gore-enriched, gratuitous nudity-infused, Doug McClure-inclusive, rubber monster-suited, feminist-outraging, shit-for-beans glory of *Humanoids*, it's not a half-bad little horror flick. Linda Blair's presence certainly doesn't hurt, nor does her outfit's sub-basement neckline, but top props ultimately go to director Tom DeSimone for infusing such a potentially by-the-numbers slasher with so much atmosphere and suspense.

John W. Bowen



Hell Night: Linda Blair's not half-bad slasher.

SOMETHING SUCKS

BLOOD SUCKERS (1972) DVD

Starring Patrick Macnee, Johnny Sekka and Peter Cushing

Directed by Robert Hartford-Davis
Written by Julian More

BLOOD THIRST (1971) DVD

Starring Robert Winston, Yvonne Nielson and Judy Dennis
Directed by Newt Arnold
Written by N.J.P. Dennis
Something Weird



Something Weird, the company that satisfied bloodlust everywhere by releasing gruesome grindhouse classics like *Two Thousand Maniacs!*, have snuck out a "vampire drive-in double feature" comprised of public domain horror cheapies *Blood Suckers* and *Blood Thirst*. Don't confuse these titles with an H.G. Lewis gorefest though, this lackluster pair doesn't have enough life to attract even the most anemic vampire.

It takes a special kind of genius to suck all the fun out of a film about vampire LSD orgies, so my cape is off to *Blood Suckers*, a plodding British bore from the era when it seemed like all vampires were young, jet-setting European millionaires on the prowl





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I DREAM OF GIALLI

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK (1972) DVD

Starring Edwige Fenech, George Hilton and Ivan Rassimov
Directed by Sergio Martino
Written by Lewis E. Ciannelli, Ernesto Gastaldi and Santiago Moncada
Shriek Show

The title alone of this first class, much-loved giallo is enough for me. It perfectly evokes the baroque, surreal intensity and sexuality of the genre and simply looks great in print. The film that follows is just the icing. Sergio Martino has long been heralded as the unsung genius of the giallo, and this flick along with the equally slick *Torso* is proof of that. While not quite the stylist Argento was in his heyday, Martino still made moody sleaze mysteries with the best of 'em.

Inspired in part by the international success of *Rosmary's Baby*, *All the Colors of the Dark* finds lascivious Italo-horror regular Edwige Fenech running afoul of some freaked-out dreams and seriously twisted Satanists. Her vaguely sinister husband (equally ubiquitous Eurotrash standby George Hilton) may or may not be the cause of her bizarre hallucinogenic delusions, but then again her sexy neighbor's a bit off and some trench coat-clad, ice blue-eyed dude (Ivan Rassimov) is trying to kill her. How long before Fenech loses her semi-psychic mind completely?

Released only briefly on these shores in the early '70s under the appropriate but crass title *You're Coming to Get Your Colors*, is an accomplished piece of work. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Martino's films actually make sense structurally (although those massive psychedelic devil cult trips really mess with your head) and *Colors* is one of the first films I can cite that effectively plays with the dream-within-a-dream device. Fenech is jaw-droppingly beautiful with or without clothes (and she's naked-er than usual in this one, my fellow Euro-pervs), there are some genuine white knuckle moments, and plenty of sick cruelty.

Shriek Show's anamorphic print is as good as it gets and they even provide the option of watching either the inoffensive English-dubbed version or the superior subtitled Italian version. They also throw in new interviews with Hilton and Martino, and the alternate opening credit sequence for the American release. All in all, a fantastic re-presentation of a fascinating footnote in Italian thriller history.

Chris Alexander

for bare necks and bacchanalia. This time, an Oxford professor vacationing in Greece falls in with a sect of hedonistic vampires, and it takes all of his friends to return him to the safety of the academic world.

Blood Suckers spends most of its time trying to equate vampirism with sex, which is strange given that it offers very little of either onscreen. Even Patrick Macnee, slumming between *The Avengers* series, and a top-billed cameo by Peter Cushing can't salvage *Blood Suckers'* 80-minute runtime.

While it doesn't up the ante on shocks or terror, at least the second half of this double feature—the Philippines-lensed *Blood Thirst*—won't put you to sleep. A famous American detective is called in to Manila when the bodies of several dance hall girls are found drained of blood. While enjoying the rousing night life, the gumshoe eventually pins the culprit down to either Aztec cults, the lumpy-faced creature lurking in the shadows, or possibly both—it's all kind of confusing. If you combined an unused plot from *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* with the questionable acting and monster mash-up of a *Santo* film, you might get something like *Blood Thirst*, an amusing, but ultimately forgettable slice of Filipino cheese.

Like the rest of Something Weird's usually enjoyable drive-in double feature releases, *Blood Suckers/Blood Thirst* is crammed with a fantastic selection of old intermission reels, spooky trailers and some sexy shorts to quench your thirst for sleazy horror fun. With films this bad, though, it's barely worth the effort to sink your teeth into this disc.

Paul Corupe

FULCI'S BITTER ABODE

SWEET HOUSE OF HORRORS (1988) DVD

Starring Jean-Christophe Brégnière, Cinzia Monreale and Lubka Lenz
Directed by Lucio Fulci
Written by Gigliola Battaglini, Lucio Fulci and Vincenzo Mannino
Shriek Show

I love Fulci. You love Fulci. Every horror fan who has any sense in his or her festering head should have fallen in

line and in love with the dearly departed splatmaster by now I mean *Zombie, The Gates of Hell, The Beyond, Don't Torture a Duckling?* I'm swooning just spelling those titles. But those films are classics, worthy of worship, and the DVD release of Fulci's ultra-late period TV-movie mess *The Sweet House of Horrors* doesn't have a spurting aorta on them. To be blunt: it sucks harder than a two-bit gasoline-siphoning Scarborough thug.

Fulci was literally on his last legs when he made this meandering turkey as part of the *Houses of Doom* series. I can picture the grand old man wheezing his demands at Italo horror regulars Cinzia Monreale (*The Beyond*) and Jean-Christophe Brégnière (*Ratz*), trying in vain to make something that not only paid the rent but freaked out the faithful as well.

Admittedly, the film begins with a bang. A dopey couple returns home one night, surprising a black-gloved killer and gets savagely deep-sixed for their troubles (his brains are dashed out and she—most spectacularly—gets both eyes knocked out of their sockets and her forehead caved in). But from that point on, sweet fuck all happens. This is strictly standard haunted house shit punctuated by the odd bit of misplaced "fat guy falls down" slapstick comedy, and it sports two of the most obnoxious kids in Eurohorror history. Throw in some horrid optical effects, a flimsy plot that resolves itself two thirds of the way in, some admittedly cool (if overused) music by Vince Tempera, and ridiculous haunted rocks (yes, haunted rocks!), and you have a shrug of a flick that fails on almost every level.

And most distressingly—hyperkinetic opening aside—no freakin' gore! Sorry Lucio, I don't mean to spit on your grave, but this sweet house is one sour piece of sad-sack cinema. For diehard completists only, if just to see how far the mighty man fell.

Chris Alexander



Two '80s slasher reissues prove that it still only takes approximately 90 minutes to ruin any special occasion.

The DEATH of the PARTY

Happy Birthday To Me (1981) DVD

Starring Melissa Sue Anderson, Glenn Ford and Lawrence Dane

Directed by J. Lee Thompson

Written by John Saxton, Peter Jobin

and Timothy Bond

Columbia TriStar

Zen Buddhists and horror fans: two distinct groups whose belief systems hinge largely upon an unfailing ability to take the good with the bad. And I'm hard-pressed to think of many films that illustrate my point more perfectly than *Happy Birthday To Me*, one of the more popular Canadian post-Halloween slasher cash-ins (a filmic fraternity of dubious distinction including *My Bloody Valentine* and *Prom Night*).

Years after surviving the car crash that killed her mother, high school senior Virginia (*Little House on the Prairie*'s Melissa Sue Anderson) still suffers from memory loss and blackouts

due to the experimental brain surgery that saved her life after the accident. Now her friends—who've taken to jumping their cars over the very drawbridge where Virginia's mother met her watery end back in the day—begin disappearing.

Director J. Lee Thompson had titles like *The Guns of Navarone* and the original *Cape Fear* adorning his resume long before prolific Canadian B-producers Andre Link and John Dunning came a-knocking with *Birthday*. Among the supporting cast we have venerable Canadian cinema veteran Lawrence Dane (*Rituals*, *Of Unknown Origin*) and Hollywood icon Glenn Ford (who reportedly was an out-of-control prima donna during the shoot). It's not that these fine ingredients are totally squandered, but the film



does suffer from an atrocious script rife with unnecessary red herrings and a laughably laboured twist ending.

Halloween—the ultimate slasher film template—and even some of its inferior offspring like *Friday the 13th* work well because of their intrinsic simplicity, while *Birthday* falls on its ass trying to be more intelligent than it really is.

Columbia's reissue looks and sounds great, although many obviously censored scenes haven't been restored, and the complete absence of extras is, in this day and age, inexcusable.

John W. Bowen

Bloody New Year (1987) DVD

Starring Suzy Amick, Jenny Bayless and Niku Brooks

Directed by Norman J. Warren

Written by Frazier Pearce

Redemption

Besides Pete Walker (*Frightmare*, *House of Whipcord*), Norman J. Warren is England's most notorious exploitation filmmaker. But unlike Walker, Warren's films kind of suck. It's not that a Norman J. Warren joint ain't filled to the choking point with gore, skin and cheap shocks; they are, but they're usually brainless affairs with not a whiff of the jet-black wit that Walker wields in even his weakest pictures.

Warren made a couple of early-'70s sex films before throwing blood into the mix with C-grade stuff like *Terror* (warmed-over *Argento*), *Alien*

Prey (lesbianism and cannibalism: by way of the BBC!) and the sexually-aware *Alien* clone *Assemblad* (great name for a band, in fact, it is the name of a band, and I'm in it!). By the time he churned out *Bloody New Year* the burn-hungry bickie had hit rock bottom. The film is a shockingly dull, utterly inept and thoroughly unsexy burlesque that rips off *The Evil Dead* with the finesse of a 350-pound figure skater. Warren even skimped on the red stuff and kept the ladies in their Levis. Smooth move, Guy, ya gave us nuthin'. Seriously, this movie is sooo bad I'm almost recommending it. Almost.

A bunch of ugly Brit kids (and one semi-foxy Yankee dame) get stranded—in broad daylight

—in the most excuse for a haunted hotel ever. Suddenly, lame, weird stuff happens: ghosts, possessed fishnets, doors that open onto cliffs,



flying POV camera shots, and zombies with Silly Putty on their faces. Again, all this shit goes down in broad daylight, in brightly lit rooms or in sunny green fields. Plus, as people die, the survivors have time for a pint and a poke. Once you get into its moronic rhythm and accept its stupidity, you can kind of see what Warren might have been able to do with a few extra bucks, but you have to use your creativity for that, and really, that's way too much work. Rent *Terror* if you want the definitive Warren experience. Or don't.

Chris Alexander

Writer-producer **TED A. BOHUS** dishes on the long-awaited DVD release of his microbudget cult classic **THE DEADLY SPAWN**, a tale of deadly alien worms with even deadlier appetites.

reissues presents

RETURN OF THE KILLER WORMS FROM OUTER SPACE!

BY SEAN PENDER

Never underestimate the drawing power of Jennifer Beals. Writer/producer Ted A. Bohus learned that lesson the weekend of April 15, 1983 when his film, *The Deadly Spawn*, a gussy, gore-soaked '80s B-movie throwback, was slammed by the cultural juggernaut known as *Flashdance*. Although Bohus' messy creature feature didn't have an MTV-approved soundtrack or hard-bodied dancers, it had a lot of heart... and a ton of blood and guts, naturally. Now, more than two decades later, *Flashdance* has (thankfully) stayed dead and the alien terror has returned in the form of a special edition DVD release from Synapse Films.

The Deadly Spawn (k.k.s. *Return of the Aliens: The Deadly Spawn*), to capitalize on the success of *Alien* is a low-budget (around \$20,000 US) monster mash inspired by classic alien invasion films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and *The Blob* (1958), but is bloodier in the, well, vein, of later successes like *Alien* (1979). As schlocky as it is, over the years *The Deadly Spawn* has wormed its way into the hearts of a generation of horror fanatics thanks to some bloody good special effects and a script that doesn't play dumb.

"You get tired of these movies where this gigantic, loud roar comes up from the basement and someone says, 'Oh, let me go check that out,'" Bohus told *Rue Morgue*. "Or they hear this blood-curdling scream from outside and they go, 'Let me go out there [alone] and see what that was'—things that no one would normally do. So we tried to poke fun at that and have a real reason for people to go down into the basement."

The plot concerns a bunch of downright fugly monsters that fall to Earth by way of a meteor. They make their way to—where else?—the basement of a nearby house where residents fall victim to the worm-like xenomorphs one by one. Resourceful teens trapped inside struggle to survive as the aliens grow bigger with each subsequent human meal.

The fans ate up *The Deadly Spawn* in return, and after its dismal theatrical release (a miracle in its own right) it proliferated in video stores. Anyone familiar with the Beta years recalls the sensationalist, multi-fanged monster featured on the cover of the damaskette—irresistible imagery for the B-movie junkies—and a still-growing online cult of adherents continue to exhort the film's messy but undeniable charms.

"They just say they are so tired of these CGI monsters that look like cartoons," Bohus says of the film's fans. "The *Deadly Spawn*—even though it was low-budget—had an actual, physical, prosthetic creature there, and the fans just enjoyed watching it move, even though they knew it was a piece of rubber with a little lever in the back where a guy was opening and closing the mouth."

As a result of this enduring fan devotion, Bohus was approached by numerous companies over the years looking to re-release his cult classic. Synapse head Don May was the most enthusiastic, though, encouraging the producer to scour his archives for lost elements, including the original negative, since previous video versions had simply blown up the original 16mm print to 35mm, resulting in terrible picture and sound quality.

A search of Bohus' own basement unearthed

the lost reels which were used for the digitally remastered re-release. The DVD includes two audio commentaries (one with director Douglas McKeown and the cast, and the other with Bohus), an alternate opening sequence, an outtake reel, audition tape, extensive still galleries and a comic-style prequel that explains how the aliens made their way to Earth.

Although there was an unofficial follow-up made by Glen Takaquian in 1993 called *Metamorphosis: The Alien Factor*, Bohus hopes to create an official sequel some day. The B-movie maker says he's encouraged by initial DVD sales and has a sequel script half-written. Regardless, he is pleased as parasites that his modest contribution to horror history is finally getting its due.

"I'm just happy that the film is being preserved," he says. "It amazes me all the time that this little low-budget movie is doing what it's doing."



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Produced by Rod Gudino



Image Entertainment's newly released **THE ED WOOD BOX** is an essential primer on the schlock director's most notorious years and should be the cornerstone of every serious Z-movie collection.

BOX OF SCHLOCK!

BY PAUL CORUPE

Can your heart stand the shocking facts about Image Entertainment's Ed Wood DVD box set? Harry and Michael Medved inadvertently made Edward D. Wood Jr. a cult hero when they branded him the "worst director of all time" in their 1980 book *The Golden Turkey Awards*. It's true that Wood's films are poorly made, by even the most forgiving standards, but they have also proved entertaining enough to attract a new legion of fans who have rediscovered the maverick auteur through home video.

Whether you're laughing at the lousy production values or simply basking in the surreal qualities of such hard won incompetence, Wood's films somehow exude a threadbare charm that trumps meager acting, stilted dialogue and not-very-special effects. It's this spe-

cial kind of Z-grade magic that has helped films like *Bride of the Monster* stand the test of time and become unparalleled classics.

Image's *The Ed Wood Box* compiles five of the director's films, and a recently made documentary, into one bright pink present that retails for little more than what Wood probably spent on most of his projects. From *Glen or Glenda?*, a heartfelt chronicle of his own double life as a cross-dresser, to *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, his magnum opus scripted around a few scant minutes of footage of the recently deceased Bela Lugosi, this set cements Wood's reputation as the Orson Welles of schlock—a director whose enthusiasm and creativity with a miniscule budget more than made up for his lack of talent behind the camera.

GLEN OR GLENDA? (1953) DVD

Starring Bela Lugosi, Dolores Fuller and Edward D. Wood Jr.

What was supposed to be a quickie exploitation film made to cash in on sex change headline-maker Christine Jorgensen took a strange biographical turn when Wood got his well-manicured hands on it. Armed with gratuitous stock footage and narrator Bela Lugosi's non sequiturs, Wood plays Glen, an angora sweater-obsessed transvestite searching for understanding from the woman he loves, played by his real-life girlfriend Dolores Fuller.

Wood's most personal work is also his most surreal, a pastiche of hallucinatory scenes presented without much plot to tie them together. Will Glen's best girl accept his penchant for lacy undergarments and evening gowns, or will he be

destroyed by his own personal demons? In the end it really doesn't matter, because for pure weirdness, *Glen or Glenda?* ranks among Wood's finest and most unique efforts.

JAIL BAIT (1954) DVD

Starring Lyle Talbot, Dolores Fuller and Steve Reeves

Plan 9 From Outer Space isn't the "worst movie ever made." In fact, it's not even the worst film that Ed Wood made. The ultra-cheap film noir takeoff *Jail Bait* easily earns that prize. Filmed under the far more appropriate title *The Hidden Face*, this tale of sin and surgery lacks the widely eccentric atmosphere of Wood's best remembered works.

The story details a gangster on the lam who blackmails a brother and sister to force their plastic surgeon father to alter his appearance.

Unfortunately, every plot point is focused on setting up *Jail Bait*'s pulpy final twist, and there's not much to hold the viewer's attention until you get there—even the debut of future *Korcoran* strongman Steve Reeves can't revitalize this one.

BRIDE OF THE MONSTER (1955) DVD

Starring Bela Lugosi, Tor Johnson and Tony McCoy

If you took every cheap monster movie ever made, purged them in a blender, and poured the contents into a cheap whisky glass, you'd have something like *Bride of the Monster*. Wood's first foray into horror and science fiction stars Bela Lugosi as Dr. Vornoff, an aging scientist bent on world domination through the creation of atomic supermen and, uh, octopi.

Highlights of this fast-paced 70-minute film

WOOD'S WEIRD LOVE

NECROMANIA: A TALE OF WEIRD LOVE (1971) DVD

Starring Rene Bond, Ric Lutze and Maria Aronoff
Written and directed by Edward D. Wood Jr. (as Don Miller)
Fleshbot Films

"I admit it's a strange place, but strange happenings come from strange happenings," explains Shirley (Rene Bond) to her husband Danny (Ric Lutze), thereby sort-of addressing his reluctance towards visiting a "Necromancer" to cure his sexual dysfunction. Bond, a well-known porn star, wasn't simply polishing another cracked rhinestone of Ed Woodian dialogue, though; she was summing up his unintentionally surreal oeuvre.

In the long-lost, recently unearthed *Necromania: A Tale of Weird Love*, the celebrated/masticated filmmaker's last directorial project before his death in 1978, hardcore porn grinds hips with the uncanny (an alternate software cut is also included on the DVD). A vampire—or maybe just a witch who sleeps in a coffin—and her scantily-clad minions lure a young couple to a mansion—or maybe just a bungalow

decorated with cheap props—because "Necromancers have all sorts of potions and things to help you." Sweaty, hairy, nasty '70s shagging ensues, leading to the, um, climax involving coffin coitus with one diabolical Madame Heies, pronounced "heels" (Maria Aronoff).

Naturally, Wood's endearing ineptitude shines. Actors look at the camera, flub lines, and in one scene Lutze cracks up when his pajama bottoms malfunction. Additionally, the sets on the \$7000 film are shamelessly recycled, a raty stuffed dog appears in seemingly every frame, and a cross-eyed Daisy Duke look-alike ritually masturbates with a ceramic skull. Although Wood (working here as "Don Miller") was an alcoholic reduced to making cheap skin-flicks, he didn't abandon his obsession with sexual deviance and the supernatural that mark his '50s projects like *Glen or Glenda?*, *Bride of the Monster*, *The Violent Years* or *Night of the Ghouls*. To quote his own dialogue from *Necromania*: "Some want too much, others too little." Wood may have been in the former category, but that's why we love him.

Dave Alexander



include the first appearance of Wood ensemble characters Kelton the Cop (Paul Marco) and Lobo (Swedish wrestling sensation Tor Johnson), as well as Lugosi's wonderful speech about being lost in a "forsaken jungle hell." With mad doctors, test tubes, lumbering assistants and the star of *Dracula* himself, *Bride of the Monster* is obviously Wood's warped take on the classic Universal monster films of his youth.

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE (1956) DVD

Starring Bela Lugosi, Tor Johnson, Vampira and Tom Kenealy

Simultaneously despised and worshipped, laughed at and feared, Wood's opus of effeminate space aliens bent on destroying earth by reanimating a chiropractor with a passing resemblance to Bela Lugosi, is a timeless cult classic. *Plan 9* is certainly Wood's most ambitious picture, and by far his most fun. Sure, naysayers will point out a mountain of continuity errors, terrible acting and TV psychic Criswell's atrocious introduction speech, but this is the film that mixes all the Woodian trademarks of inept filmmaking in all the right proportions, quite simply, this is the best bad film you'll ever see.

Also included on the disc is Mark Patrick Carducci's indispensable documentary *Flying Saucers Over Hollywood: The Plan 9 Companion* which details every aspect of the film, including a visit to the original sound stages where the film was shot.

NIGHT OF THE GHOULS (1957) DVD

Starring Kenne Duncan, Duke Moore and Tor Johnson

Wood's last movie of the 1950s was presumed lost until the 1980s, when producer Wade Williams reportedly found the dusty film cans in a lab and footed the unpaid bill. A full-on horror film which has Wood operating at his most atmospheric and spooky, *Night of the Ghouls* is much more than the sum of its dime store spook-show effects.

With all of his post-mortem footage of Lugosi used up, Wood brought Kenne Duncan into the fold, an aging star who was popular as a western B-movie villain in the 1940s. Here, Duncan is cast as Dr.acula, a shady medium blinking the unsuspecting townsfolk with phony messages from beyond the grave. Tor Johnson returns as Lobo, as do Criswell and Paul Marco, but the real reason to check out the film is a hilarious séance sequence. Even though you can see that Wood has learned a few techniques to compensate for his lack of budget, his writing and directing skills haven't improved much, making this another bizarre contribution to his resumé.

THE HAUNTED WORLD OF EDWARD D. WOOD, JR. (1996) DVD

Starring Vampira, Dolores Fuller and Paul Marco

The Haunted World of Edward D. Wood, Jr. is a new documentary that combines interviews from Wood's friends and colleagues with archival footage and film clips to give a relatively fair and balanced portrait of the artist as a determined entrepreneur. Although it dispels some of the myths and misconceptions surrounding the infamous director, the film glosses over the last two decades of Wood's life, sad years that plunged him into an abyss of smut, degradation, alcoholism, and poverty.

Several special features make up for a lack on the other discs, and include a newly re-edited version of Wood's "debut" film, the 30-minute western *Crossroads of Laredo*. A heartfelt homage to Wood and his films, the documentary and supplemental material on this final disc gives *The Ed Wood Box* a cohesiveness that makes it a true, definitive retrospective of the director's early years: a fascinating series of films that have defined and personified so-called "bad" cinema for almost half a century. ☼



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SILENT JEKYLL. CLASSIC HYDE

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1920) DVD

Starring John Barrymore, Nita Naldi
and Charles Lane

Directed by John S. Robinson

Written by Clara S. Beranger

Based on the novel by

Robert Louis Stevenson

Kino On Video

Paramount's 1920 adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* hit theatres the same year as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and two years before *Nosferatu*, and easily ranks with those German Expressionist classics as a major horror production of the silent era. John Barrymore's maniacally evil turn as the literary world's most famous split personality drives this thrilling take on Robert Louis Stevenson's classic chiller.

At least half a dozen films based on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were produced in the early days of cinema, including a lost version by F.W. Murnau, but Canadian director John S. Robinson's adaptation is easily the best and most important to have survived. With the exception of an added romantic subplot, his film never strays far from the original story of the benevolent medical doctor Henry Jekyll, who attempts to isolate his compulsions towards good and evil into separate bodies. Drinking an untested potion, he inadvertently manifests his immoral behaviour in the ugly, murderous persona of Mr. Hyde, who struggles to take over his maker's body.

Popular matinee idol John Barrymore was an unlikely choice for the title roles, but now it's difficult to imagine anyone else filling his child-stomping shoes. Using only the contortions of his face and body in the much-limited scene, Barrymore's naturalistic approach to the transformation of Jekyll into Hyde was groundbreaking at the time.



Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde: a classic of the silent era.

Barrymore is downright lecherous as Hyde, spreading long sinewy fingers around darkened doorways and across the necks of dance hall girls, but he relies more on violently arched eyebrows and twisted poses than the sparse makeup used to alter his appearance.

Unlike other early productions, which characterized Hyde as the ultimate evil through grotesque features that bore little resemblance to the good doctor, Barrymore plays the ghoul as a sinister mirror image of Jekyll. Throughout the film he manages to keep the hint of one character alive in the other, underscoring the notion that the boundary between civility and the savagery of lust and murder is a delicate one.

Admittedly, some of Barrymore's highly-theatrical gesticulations produce more chuckles than chills today, but *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* overcomes its occasional silliness to deliver some powerful scenes. Hyde's vicious bludgeoning of the father of his alter-ego's fiancée is particularly memorable, as is a fantastically-conceived nightmare sequence that has Jekyll feasted upon

by a giant spider with Hyde's head—a little taste of Grand Guignol that surely would have had a devastating effect on audiences of its time.

If previous public domain DVDs of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were unsightly barebones releases that may have seemed more akin to Jekyll's evil double, then Kino On Video has obviously discovered an antidote which has restored the film to its former glory. In addition to a crisp remaster and a new string-heavy score, this disc is stacked with a robust selection of bonus features. Most interesting is ten minutes of footage from a rival 1920 version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* produced by the Pioneer Film Corp. and rushed into theatres to capitalize on the interest in Paramount's films. Also here, are a Stan Laurel short film parody called *Dr. Pyckle and Mr. Pride*, an audio clip of the transformation scene taken from a 1909 recording of the story, and text features on the film and score. Boasting a first-rate presentation for one of the pre-eminent silent horrors, this DVD is a must-have for fans of classic horror.

Paul Corupe



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THE MAD MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID CINEPHILE

by Chris Alexander



ally questionable taste in slack-jawed shock cinema. Specifically, his Royal Tiredness proclaimed that only a drooling plebeian such as myself could/would appreciate the work of controversial and muchos loathed D-movie auteur Jesus "Jess" Franco, who directed the unofficial entry in the series: *Isa, The Wicked Warden*. Hey John Boy, blie me! I accept your challenge; I love Franco, and I'll tell you why.

For those who don't know, Franco was, in his prime, one of the most prolific purveyors of Euroleaze on the face of the great unwashed earth. Spanish born, but famous in France, he has over 180 freakin' films under his sizable, sometimes self-starring, multi-pseudonymed belt. These titles include westerns, romances, comedies, softcore smut, hardcore porn and, of course, horror — sometimes all of the above crammed awkwardly into the same silly spoof.

The debate over old man Franco (who is still working, by the way), is that many — okay most — genre buffs consider his films to be incompetent, incoherent, zoom-happy lumps of lardon garbage. And, Hell's Bells, I have to admit, they're kind of correct. Witness "classics" like the pube-hungry *Bare Breasted Countess* (1973, a.k.a. *The Loves of Anna*, a.k.a. *Erotic Kill*, etc.).

This patly excuse for a vampire movie features the luscious porn queen and Franco regular Lina Romay (*Oasis of the Zombies*, 1983), a Carnal-esque ghoul who drinks both blood and semen, but really the flick is simply an excuse for Franco to point his lens at her wild, untamed muff.

Or how about *White Carnal Queen* (a.k.a. *Suavidad*, 1981), with its honky gutmunchers that look like Winnie Vincent? This truly terrible non-epic is rightly regarded as the absolute worst jungle film ever made — ever! And then

there's the ultra-sick, misogynistic *Exorcisms* (1979), the Franju bastardization *Faceless* (1988), the tasteless Naziplotzation number *Love Camp* (1977), the kooky Klaus Kinski slash-shocker *Jack the Ripper* (1976), and *Count Dracula* (1970), the lamest Slicker stroke ever to see a projector's beam. The list goes on and on and freakin' on.

But, incompetence and lechery aside, what makes a Franco film a Franco film? To understand the man's, um, unique cinematic aesthetic, we must first understand that celluloid was not the Jesus' first love. No, Franco was first and foremost a composer, a trained pianist and jazz musician whose gift for expression eventually translated (with varying degrees of success) to almost all media. He became an actor, novelist, screenwriter, producer and eventually a director.

His passion (and possible A.D.D.) led him to become the most prolific artist of his time, perhaps of all time. And like anyone who mass-produces, quality is sometimes an afterthought to quantity. But Franco is not only talented (he worked with Orson Welles for crying out loud), he is also a genuine reckless eccentric. He's a voyeur; a man who likes to stare, to observe and record, not just sex or sleaze or gratuitous violence but sailboats, crashing waves, wide open eyes and natural beauty.

In his best work, stuff like the dreamy *Solidad* Miranda vehicle *Vampyrus Lesbos* (1971) and its companion piece *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1971), we see sweetness and gentleness under the lurid layer of blood and tits, courtesy of a visionary who simply, innocently, just loves to "watch." I see a lot of myself in the work of Jesus Franco. He's a charming pervert who places passion over skill, and I, more than anyone else scribbling in these puny pages, can appreciate that. Bowen, may you choke on the Tail Man's balls. Alexander out. ☺

For the Love of Jesus! in my off-hours, while *Rue Morgue* shifted and mutated like the literary happy cancer that it is, I had plenty of time to contemplate life, masturbate endlessly and peruse back issues of the mag that made my name part of your helish household. In doing so, I came across John Bowen's otherwise excellent critique of the sickening *Isa* series (*RMF* 40) and got sucker-punched by his none-too-subtle jabs at my reputation as a writer, citing my occasion-

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IN THIS ISSUE!

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS #1 (OF 3)

by Barker, Garkis and Hernandez IDW

STOKER'S DRACULA #1 (OF 4)

by Stoker, Thomas and Giordano Marvel

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

by Neil Gaiman and Michael Zuki Dark Horse

ANGELFIRE

by Chris Blythe and Steve Porthouse Starline Comics

THE AWAKENING

by Matt Shaffer and Luca Genovese Ovi Press

HELLBLAZER: ALL HIS ENIGMAS

by Mike Carey and Leonardo Manzo DC/Vertigo

THE WICKED WEST

by Livingston, Tinsell and Vokes Image

By no means is there any kind of adaptive renaissance going on in horror comics right now. But there are nonetheless a plethora of adaptations to choose from in any given month, and knowing what to look for based on what we'll call the "in-store skim" can help you separate the darker matter from the well-intentioned but ultimately lighter fare.

This issue we're going slightly academic by assessing the quality of three recent comic book adaptations of well-known novels. In terms of adapting the horror classics – in this case, tales by Clive Barker, Bram Stoker and Neil Gaiman – several criteria (characterization, pacing and artistic style) should come into consideration when judging the value of a horror story-turned-comic.

First off, don't expect protagonists to appear as they did in your mind's eye when you first read the book. Instead, ask yourself simply whether the artist seems to have tapped the characters' notable qualities. Consider it a bonus if it's a visualization that could only work in comics.

An exquisite example is IDW's just-launched three-issue adaptation of Clive Barker's *The Thief of Always*, with artist Gabriel Hernandez's brilliant rendering of Rictus, the otherworldly child-kidnapper. A "rictus" is, of course, a "gaping grimace", and Hernandez fleshes out the charming creep with a sinister perma-smile so much larger than life that it extends, impossibly, beyond the contours of his squalline face (see cover, inset). Not necessarily the way you imagined Barker's character, but nevertheless, a successful imagining that works.

Second: from the dialogue to the text boxes to the plot-relevant information contained in the raw imagery, the story must appear to move forward at a pace suitable not to novels but to the comic medium. Fidelity to the source material is requisite, yes, but



Creatures of the Night: The Devil truly is in artist Michael Zuki's details.

never to the point of compromising a satisfying serialization – most importantly, there needs to be conflict, and each chapter needs to peak.

Stoker's *Dracula*, a current Marvel mini-series, is claiming to be the classic novel's most faithful adaptation ever, regardless of medium, and for once Marvel hype might be accurate. Rendered in gorgeous black and white washes by veteran artist Dick Giordano, issue #1 concludes in Dracula's castle, as Jonathan Harker comes face to face with the reality of his essentially unreal situation. (For my part, I don't even like the Marvel-brand visualization of Drac himself, but I can't deny that this serial's pacing is, so far, bloody perfect.)

And last but not least, there's the art. Alas, difficult to spot on a "skim", artistic and/or adaptive departures are



all but unnoticeable. They are a truly gifted artist's way of putting a personal stamp on a project without disrespecting or overshadowing the original author. The best way to spot these departures on the fly is to look specifically for action sequences, then compare the text boxes to the actual images.

Michael Zullo's recently released *Creations of the Night* adapts two animal-orientated horror shorts from Neil Gaiman's collection *Smoke and Mirrors*. The Price, one of the two transposed tales, culminates in a show-out battle between the Devil himself and a house cat (!). Tricky material, without question; not only does Zullo rise to the task, but he takes sensible liberties in the name of realism so as to make the battle not only visually credible but, as intended, tragically heroic.

Gaiman's original prose remains sacrosanct in the text boxes, and while Zullo's image panels don't exactly match their descriptions, everything nonetheless gels. It looks effortless, more importantly, it looks right. Gaiman, I'm confident, would approve. **A**

QUICK CUTS

Suspense is key in any good horror story, but surprise carries clout as well. Without giving too much away, *AngelFire* is a tautly-paced graphic novel notable for a number of effective twists, one of which is the fact that halfway through the proceedings it morphs seamlessly from the tale of a drug addict on a downward spiral into a full-blown haunted house story. Basic, albeit strong, characters are high-



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lighted by anti-hero John Dury – think John Constantine without the magic, not to mention the street smarts.

Watching as Dury makes painfully human, in-over-his-head mistakes is a libertine joy. It's been a while since I've read a horror comic as screen-ready as this one. Too bad it's available online only (at shatteredfables.com).

Someone's been doing their homework – and it isn't the cast of nihilist schoolgirls in the deliciously wicked giallo comic *The Awakening* (BTW, that's a compliment). Clearly, writer Neal Shaffer knows his '70s Italian horror cinema, and it's no exaggeration to maintain that his comic reads like a never-filmed Dario Argento classic.

Alas, the proceedings are ultimately slightly more *Inferno* than they are *Deep Red*, only because Shaffer fails to satisfactorily wrap up his otherwise superb story of a hedonist schoolgirl cursed with psychic visions of her classmates being murdered. Giallo tales rely on the twist revelation of the killer, however ridiculous the explanation – and if anything, this one simply isn't outlandish enough.

Regardless, it's a near-perfect read, with phenomenal, cinematic visual momentum courtesy of artist Luca Genovese (an Italian, no less!) "You won't believe her eyes," promised an Oni press release, and it's almost true.

With a title that references Milton's *Paradise Lost* – and the Devil's fated destiny to literally go to Hell, despite his best efforts – it's clear from the get-go that the stand-alone hardcover *Hellblazer: All His Engines* intends to deliver a Constantine tale of truly epic proportions.

Indeed, this one's probably the bloodiest (possibly the gutsiest) *Hellblazer* tale ever told, as everyone's favourite "bad magi-

cian" intentionally places himself in the middle of what amounts to a demonic turf war. DC's legendary bawling bastard is at his brzen best here since Brian Azzarello's *Hard Time*; insolent yet insightful one-liners abound, and Constantine's unorthodox solutions have rarely been this audacious, not to mention compounded.

Hellblazer has never had a shortage of top-notch storytellers, but Carey (who is also the monthly series' regular helmsman now) is hands-down the best writer on the title since Jamie Delano. Time will tell if he surpasses him.

With the stark, chiaroscuro image of a cowboy, a vampire and a holt of lightning, you'd think that the cover of *The Wicked West* pretty much says it all. But that image is just the tip of the cactus. The creative team delivers a uniquely adventurous take on Western horror that somehow manages to deconstruct the hero myth without compromising the atmosphere of rollickin' Republic serial shenanigans and downright depraved vampire bloodletting.

Simultaneously set in 1870 and 1932, it pairs off two fether-figure stories, with a Wild West-era Sheriff rescuing a wide-eyed child in a Texas town being invaded by bloodsuckers, and an old man taking his grandson to see a Depression-era film version of the events. An exceptionally managed balancing act, this "West" is weird, wicked and absolutely wondrous. **A**

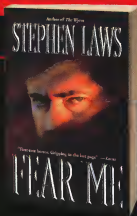


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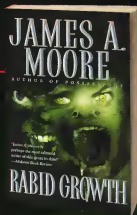


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italian horror film directors

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I love Italo horror as much as the next *Morgue*-ite and I've read my fair share of in-depth exposés. Long-time genre geek Louis Paul's lovingly compiled compendium of the men behind the pasta massacres is a very good addition to this sick stack of pulp, but I'm two shades shy of gushing over *Italian Horror Film Directors* for a couple of reasons. One, Paul is not much of a writer—he has no flair, no distinction, and no evident passion. His admittedly thorough book is unfortunately kind of flat—more a textbook than a testament. I judge all Eurohorror tomes against Cahill and Tombs' astounding *Immoral Tales: European Sex & Horror Movies 1956-1984*, the King Kong of cinematic love-ins and, sadly, in comparison *IHFD* is drier than a popcorn fart.

My other beef with the book is Paul's weird insistence of only listing the original Italian titles for each director's works. I mean I know Fulci's *The Beyond* is really called *E in vivrai nel terrore - L'aldilà* but did you know? C'mon. Props for keeping it pure, but this only serves to isolate non-Italian obsessives who love these films under their myriad of other titles. And that horrid dual-tone, red and green(ish) cover won't grab anyone either.

On the plus side, Paul includes every damn gory Guido to ever wield a camera. He



goes psychotically in-depth with the big shots (Fulci, Argento, D'Amato) but also tips his hat to more obscure guys like Antonio Bido (*The Cat With Green Eyes*). Nice touch. There are great albeit brief forewords by Jess Franco (who's Spanish, but that's cool) and the fruit of Fulci's loins, his daughter Antonella. Overall, *IHFD* is a good read for the hardcore fan, but a head-scratcher for the newcomer.

Chris Alexander

A vault of horror

Keith Topping
Telos Publishing

Somewhere in the slimy folds of my brain lies a bit o' gray matter that likes things dissected, labeled and categorized. This penchant could have led me to a cornership, but instead manifests itself more benignly in an appreciation for factoid-heavy movie guidebooks, even ones as flawed as Englishman Keith Topping's *A Vault of Horror*.

Subtitled *A Book of 80 Great (And Not So Great) British Horror Movies From 1936 - 1974*, the prolific Topping's latest work (his 33rd) is no definitive history, as he admits, but is instead a highly personal guide to the domestic fright flicks that haunted his adolescence. Connoisseurs of the era will likely grumble at certain omissions, but Topping covers the basics (*The Wicker Man*, *The Devil Rides Out*, and *Quatermass and the Pit* among them), as well as bringing to light



less familiar titles (*Doomwatch* and *The Blood on Satan's Claw* sound absolutely crackerjack).

Topping's methodology, though, while mostly informative, is too often tiresome. He supplements the basics (Tagline, Plot, Themes, Review) with other useful categories (Outrageous Methods of Dispatch, Nudity, Violence and Sadomasochism) but then buggers things up with the likes of *You May Remember Me From...* (who cares about the filmographies of actors no one's ever heard of?). It's a piecemeal approach that sometimes supplies too much information, and sometimes too little.

So who is this book for? Horror buffs are likely already familiar with much of the gossip that comprises the *Story Behind The Movie* entries (like *Night of the Demon* executive producer Hal Chester's insertion of the mechanical monster behind director Jacques Tourneur's back), but novices should find *A Vault of Horror* a valuable introduction to a second time in horror history. So put on a stiff upper lip, and don't forget to bring it with you to Blockbuster.

Sean Plummer

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In 1955, *The Night of the Hunter* fell on theatres and brought with it a new shade of dark. It set a precedent in numerous ways,

The Grim Reader

THE PRISON

R. Patrick Gates

Pinnacle Books

The New Rome Correctional Institute is the hurling ground for a demon spirit that feeds on despair, and what better place for a midnight snack of misery than a prison inhabited by some of the most exalted rapists and murderers imaginable. Author Gates delivers a bloodsoaked, fast-paced (if not terribly original) tale.

Monica S. Kuchler



THE DARK

NEW GHOST STORIES

Ellen Datlow, Ed.

For Paperbacks

This Horror Guild-winning anthology features some damn fine writing, from Joyce Carol Oates' poetic Subway to Kathie Koja's character study Velocity (featuring a ghostly Mr. MacKovic, no less), but other tales of spirits wretched and lonely, helpful and ominous are sadly not as horrific. Like an immortal phantom, this collection soon becomes wearied.

Lisa Ladouceur



BLACK FIRE

James Kidman

Leisure Books

James Kidman's (real name Brian Freeman of Cemetery Dance Magazine) debut novel contains the strengths and flaws found in many first-time books. Nevertheless, Kidman delivers atmosphere, excitement, and a few nicely done plot twists. *Black Fire* shows promise, and so does this new author.

Don Kays



ASSAULT OF THE KILLER B'S

Jason Paul Cullum

McFarland

Screen queen fanboy Jason Paul Cullum verbally fables the objects of his affection in *Assault of the Killer B's* but there's little satisfaction to be had. Cullum corals several interviews with disaffiliated horror celebs (*Night of the Living Dead's* Judith O'Dea, *Slumber Party Massacre's* Brinke Stevens and Cassandra Peterson, a.k.a. Elvira) but his credited ramblings obscure the insights of these female fatales.

Sean Plummer



The Night of the Hunter: The story behind the story.

overhauling the tenets of storytelling, tinkering with the mechanics of filmmaking and reveling in both innuendo and blatancy in a way most Hollywood films had yet to do.

But it was a flop. Mixed reviews, ambivalent audience reception and lazy marketing by United Artists buried the film. It wasn't until about a decade ago — when the National Film Registry included it among select films at the Library of Congress and the American Film Institute slated it at 34 in the top 100 thrillers — that it finally attracted the veneration it deserved.

No two ways about it, *The Night of the Hunter* is a great story (see Classic Cut *RAM42*). And like all great stories, there's an equally fascinating tale behind it. *Heaven and Hell to Play With* by Preston Neal Jones, spins that yarn relying largely on interview transcripts with twelve of the film's most important collaborators; author Davis Grubb, cinematographer Stanley Cortez, actor Robert Mitchum and producer Paul Gregory among them. If only director Charles Laughton were still alive to add the last dash of intimacy.

But it's Laughton's memory that his erstwhile co-workers recall with the most vision, sincerity and, interestingly, contradiction. Whatever the account, Laughton was admired by all as a sophisticated artist with a battery of talents that came together to make *Hunter* the seminal piece of work that it's now recognized for being. His directorial style, especially for a tenderfoot, was key to the artistic success of *Hunter*, and all of Jones' interview subjects take note of it at some point.

Although easily the most fascinating, Charles Laughton is just one topic Jones manages to mine in *Heaven and Hell to Play With*. The controversy over

Hunter's script is vividly recalled, as is everything from Robert Mitchum's had boy floundering to the arrogant Cortez's lighting strategies. It's all here, complete with set diagrams, character sketches and rare photographs.

Paul Carlucci

Taverns of the Dead

Kealan Patrick Burke, Ed.
Cemetery Dance Publications

A man walks into a bar. He doesn't walk out — at least not from the kind of drinking establishments in this short story collection,

anyway. The 27 tales in *Taverns of the Dead* are set in and about the kind of pubs, bars and saloons where scowrows and shadows linger, fights break out and eerie forces lurk.

Accounts of straggling out-of-towners stumbling into the wrong bar dominate. Neil Gaiman's Shoggoth's Old Peculiar pits an American backpacker against a mysterious British pub frequented by Lovecraftian regulars. Ramsey Campbell's *The Winner* is full of dread, as a meek musician is trapped by increasingly hostile (and insane) locals while waiting out a storm. Edward Lee's *The Order Of Nature* puts a surprise twist on this scenario, upping the ante with violence.

These kinds of stories challenge the notion of taverns as places of refuge. Whether running from the elements or their own problems, one innocent victim after another seeks shelter and finds only trouble. But the best selections are those in which the taverns are not the source of evil, just an appropriately spooky setting for a damned good story.

Melanie Tem's Kristine's Kwiet Korner sets out a world where victims of violence, the kind who so often feel voiceless, embrace complete silence. In this original story it's

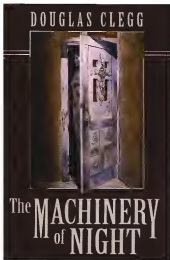


douglas clegg knows that nothing is more horrific than the human heart.

The Human In Horror



by monica s. kuebler



novel *The Hour Before Dark*, tragedy drives three siblings back to their childhood home to face the long-suppressed memory of watching their father strip and murder their mother in a cold, violent rage before forcing them to help dig her makeshift grave.

"The horrific moment is the catalyst for this life-shattering, and I believe when one faces one's greatest fears, change occurs," Clegg explains, adding that his characters must "traverse the dark" to chart the course of their own lives.

His latest release, *The Machinery of Night* (available from Cemetery Dance Publications), is a self-described "gigantic zepplin of a

hook" that clocks in at over 720 pages, and contains nearly every short story (and selected poems) penned by the author prior to 2003, including several never-published tales. The compendium reveals the full scope of Clegg's immersion in the genre; ghost stories (*Damned If You Do*) mingle seamlessly with psychological thrillers (*The Machinery Of Night* – the hook's namesake) and more visceral terrors (*I Am Infinite: I Contain Multitudes*). Often these subgenres combine, as in 265 *And Heaven*, where a small town cop is haunted by the memory of a crime scene and eventually comes to believe that committing a ritualistic murder there will briefly reunite him with his dead sister in heaven.

A self-proclaimed "international spy in the house of horrors," Clegg views himself as a

storyteller whose curiosity lies in observing the fractured lives of others – their desires and motivations. As such, his works explore the human condition, setting the stage for atmospheric plots that rise above cheap frights and gross-out tactics.

Whether it's innocent first love savagely manipulated and bloodied in *Purity*, or the paranoia which preys on the group of teens (another type of family) in *Becoming Men* – a paranoid, grisly *Lord of the Flies*-style story set in a boot camp – Clegg strips his characters down to their most fearful and human. Be it born from anger, heartbreak or desperation, they either survive civil or become it, as happens to the youths in the latter story, who embrace their psychopathic tendencies and slaughter the adults trying to rehabilitate them.

As in the author's novels, the binding thread throughout *Machinery* is the harrowing exploration of relationships approaching the breaking point. Clegg digs up his characters' demons and makes them dance.

"I find that we're all haunted by someone or something," he says. "The human heart is the most flawed and wonderful organ of the body. It is the place where we can be most human, and yes, that makes it a fertile place for fear and shame and discovery."

In addition to *The Machinery of Night*, this year Clegg is releasing *The Abandoned*, a sex and violence-filled novel which returns to the author's familiar setting in the town of Harrow. He also maintains a weekly e-newsletter/serial e-novel available at www.douglasclegg.com.



Home may be where the heart is, but it's also where skeletons dwell in closets, secrets are shrouded, and murdered relatives are buried beneath floors or hidden in walls. These are the horrors of Douglas Clegg – the familial nightmares that eventually, unavoidably, gurgles to the surface. Raised on a diet of Böhle narratives, Grimm's fairy tales, and folk stories from around the world, the author pens genre-spanning horror fiction that revolves around volatile and often deadly close-knit relationships.

"I don't think of family as a place of horror, but as a place of potential comedy, tragedy, light and darkness," Clegg told *Rue Morgue*.

The New England-based writer, who has over fifteen books to his credit, has mastered the mechanics of the family dynamic and conjuring fear behind those closed doors. His uncanny ability to balance heartbreaking darkness with the theme of overcoming creates sympathetic characters struggling to uncover horrible buried truths, no matter the cost.

In 2003's much-lauded, *Stoker*-nominated



serial killers: The method and madness of monsters

Peter Vronsky
Berkeley Books

The lack of a media frenzy surrounding the 2001 arrest and 2003 conviction of Gary Ridgway (a.k.a. the Green River Killer), given that his official body count of 48 made him the most prolific serial killer in US history, is surprising. Why was Ridgway such a media dud? According to author Peter Vronsky, he was just too damned unremarkable.

Vronsky's unique approach in *Serial Killers: The Method and Madness of Monsters* to this admittedly overexposed subject hinges out it apart from the hundreds of titles cluttering bookshelves. He pulls no punches; the gory details are all here, yet he refuses to sensationalize, instead citing numerous statistics and studies indicating that law enforcement has grossly exaggerated the actual threat posed by serial killers in order to liberally scare up funding.

He also concentrates on a number of case histories that don't necessarily conform to popular conceptions of serial murder patterns, often at the expense of re-treading better known cases, which is

fine. Andrew Cunningham (killer of fashion mogul Gianni Versace), Unsubomber Ted Kaczynski, and the Beltway Snipers all fall between the cracks in terms of traditional classification and, hence, Vronsky grants them more space than he does higher profile figures like Jeffrey Dahmer and David "Son of Sam" Berkowitz. Putting things in perspective for our fellow Canadians, killer couple Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka are given serious ink here, while serial child murderer Clifford Olsen merits no mention.

The book's continuing fascination with serial killers and the people who track them has made minor stars of profilers like John Douglas and Robert Ressler, but while films like *Silence of the Lambs* and *Se7en* assert that profiling has evolved by leaps and bounds over the last few decades, Vronsky warns it's still an inexact and sometimes fatally flawed science, documenting an appalling number of cases in which "pure" murderers (like Shawcross and Toronto nutjob Peter Woodcock) were released only to wreak more havoc.

It's worth noting that Vronsky himself isn't a psychiatrist or profiler, his inspiration for the book stems from learning after the fact that he'd personally crossed paths with two infamous killers!

John W. Bowen

the outsider (a "talker") who threatens The Last Good Time by Tim Lebbin is another unique, emotional tale, in which a "ghost plague" has created the need for human-only bars like one called The Slaughterhouse.

Taverns of the Dead delivers medium-sized goosebumps, but it's just a wee bit too polite. I've seen scarier, freakier things at goth fetish clubs and felt more creeped out by dingy taverns where veterans start sucking back cheap beer before noon. Maybe that's why I most enjoyed Norman Patridge's *Buckets Of Blood*—a rip-roaring mess of a road trip screwed up by guns and a girl. Overall the collection is a decent read for fans of both kinds of spirits.

Luiza Ladouceur

dark water

Koji Suzuki
Vertical Inc.

The Japanese horror boom clearly shows no signs of letting up. And while films such as *Ju-On* and *Ring* have been receiving make-overs in Tinseltown, Manhattan publisher Vertical Inc. has been doing its part to enrich the landscape of horror fiction by publishing an impressive line of Japanese horror novels, all of which are being translated into English for the first time. *Dark Water* is their latest offering.

Penned by Koji Suzuki (author of the popular *Ring* novels, see *RM #33*), *Dark Water* might best be described as a concept collection of short stories, each of which centres upon water in one way or another. While the theme may sound somewhat restrictive, the tales are actually quite varied in tone—from the wistful urban fantasy of *Solitary Isle* to the grittiness of *The Hold* to more traditional Kwaider ghost stories (a tradition that is already beginning cannibalize itself both in print and film) such as *Floating Water* and *Adrift*. Unfortunately, the quality of the tales is not quite so varied. They are all flawed, often in major ways.

The pacing in almost every story (with the possible exception of *Floating Water*) is frustratingly unbalanced. The plots build at a fairly casual pace, which is fine because it allows Suzuki to add his customary layers of atmosphere and menace, but these subtleties soon become mashed up (or lost altogether) in some of the most abrupt (and predictable) endings in the history of horror. The last few paragraphs resemble hurried synopses of where the stories might have gone had the author been given time to complete them.

If nothing else, *Dark Water* proves that even the most adroit of novelists might not be successful when working within the confines of the short story. While some may argue that the author's apparently shoddy execution is rooted in its translation, I doubt that's the case. This book indicates that Suzuki's visions are best suited to longer narratives, where they have room to move and evolve of their own accord. The visions in *Dark Water*, however, seem doomed to flounder. Perhaps the American remake of the Japanese film *Dark Water* (based loosely on a story in this book) won't fall apart as quickly as the short stories do. But we doubt it.

Richard Gavin



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WARNING!

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

DARIO ARGENTO'S PROFONDO ROSSO STORE

Rome, Italy
by Leon Marcello



Ah, Rome! Risking being turned into a steaming pile of prosciutto by rampaging packs of Vespas, you have waded into Rome's infamously trafficked streets to experience but a taste of The Eternal City's seemingly unending wonders. But no matter how many artifacts and antiquities have choked your Italian tour itinerary, alas, there's still something missing. You hunger for sweetly twisted Gialli and meaty spaghetti nightmares; you crave Italian horror. Allow your less than wholesome appetites to beckon you beyond Rome's ordinary destinations to Dario Argento's Profondo Rosso store, the altar at which any Italian Horror cinephile must worship whilst in Rome.

Profondo Rosso is located at 260 Via Dei Giudei, mere blocks from Vatican City, in a somewhat residential quarter of Rome populated by the likes of coffee houses, couture boutiques, and Catholic collectible kiosks. The shop was born out of the mutual horror devotion of that blood-curdling "Italian Hitchcock" Dario Argento and his protégé in cinematic grue-gargling, Luigi Cozzi (Contamination).

Argento bought the shop during his '80s reign as the Lord of Italian Terror, and opened it on September 29, 1989. Its raison d'être is seemingly embodied by Argento's statement to Cozzi that, "We'll fund a society, you and me, and create a temple of horror and sci-fi." The temple initially began as a video store, however, when this incarnation proved unsuccessful, Cozzi made a wise decision to include horror and sci-fi collectibles to draw more customers.

The shop itself is rather unassuming despite the rubber and plastic bestiary of models, masks and monsters adorning its front windows, and its appropriately deep red façade, which looks as if it was bathed in arterial spray from one of Argento's films. It's comprised of a main floor—the store proper—and a basement, which has become Profondo Rosso's horror museum.

The middle of the store's main floor is filled with boxes of horror magazines and comics, both old and new, in various languages. Ghouliah rubber masks line the back wall, and every nook and cranny holds horror, sci-fi, or fantasy action figures and model kits. Amidst all of this is Argento's horrid oeuvre, as well as that of his contemporaries, in the form of an extensive catalogue of video cassettes and DVDs. Further Argento worship takes the form of T-shirts bearing infamous tableaux from his movies, such as the outrageous



three-story lynching from Suspiria.

Other shirts and hats are silkscreened with Profondo Rosso's logo, the former featuring the store's mascot: the nosed, cleaver-holding baby doll from the promotional advertisements for the original film of the same name (*Deep Red* for the uninited).

For music lovers, the store has a fine selection of albums, including Argento collaborators like Goblin and Dasmonia, not to mention several horror score compendiums. One of the more interesting items in the shop, however, is Cozzi's book *Già Argento*, a retrospective of the director's work published by Profondo Rosso's very own press. Cozzi himself often works the front counter and autographs copies of the book upon request.

For true Italian horror geeks, though, Profondo Rosso's real treat lies beneath in "Il Museo Degli Orrori di Dario Argento" (Dario Argento's Museum of Horror), the store's atrocity exhibition dedicated to the director's mangled, maimed, and mutilated celluloid body of horror-works. Here, Profondo Rosso holds its annual shocking Halloween sabbats and other Grand Guignol galas—all attended by Argento himself.

For a mere three Euros you get a ticket stamped "Ingresso" that allows you to descend the tenebrous stairway to the bowels of the museum. As you go down, original posters, lobby cards and other collectibles from such Argento classics as *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* and *Inferno* greet the eye.

The basement museum consists of a long brick-walled corridor with a number of "cells" branching off from it, all painted in the same blood red as the shop's outer facade. Iron gates imbue the "muses" with a dungeon-like atmosphere, and motion-detector lighting means that if you stand in one place gazing at the curios for too long, you'll be abandoned in the blackness, surrounded by the cacophonous soundtrack of shrieks, moans, and creaking doors.

The guts of the museum are made up of life-size dioramas (or, as Cozzi refers to them, "scenographic reproductions") paying tribute to Argento's infamous features. In one cell, the freakishly mutilated monster-boy from *Phenomena* lies in wait, spear in hand, to harpoon you like

he tried to do to a young Jennifer Connelly. Standing beside this terror-faced tyke is a tuxedoed puppet that could be the cousin of the chill-inducing automaton from *Profondo Rosso*. In another cell, a demonic head juts through a claw-shredded faux movie screen emblazoned with "Demon" in homage to said "Lamberto Bava-directed grotesque."

Cozzi's own work isn't forgotten amongst the Argento-filia — and you can gaze on the extraterrestrial spawn from his own post-*Alien* gorefest *Contamination*. Unfortunately, among the cells you'll also find a Freddy Krueger likeness and a sadly emaciated (fightsaber-less) Darth Vader.

Moving deeper into the museum, the basement corridor widens into a semicircular chamber with more morbid offerings. The bare-breasted torso of a helpless damsel stands chained behind the unfinished brick wall that will entomb her alive, Poe-style, while close by another partially nude female victim lies limply upon a slab, no doubt inspired by Argento's vicious *Two Evil Eyes* adaptation of *The Black Cat*.

Aside from the "scenographic reproductions", the museum naturally boasts a collection of props actually used in Argento flicks. The most exquisite of these is the butcher's assortment of (human) carving knives that sit locked in a glass cabinet. Not only is it probable that these blades have made for some of the most memorable stomach-churning moments in the maestro's homicide-mad oeuvre, but many of them (perhaps all of them) have been wielded by Argento's infamous black-gloved hands, as he has the morbid reputation of doing in his films. No doubt about it, Profondo Rosso makes for an almost religious experience for any Argento geek.



Profondo Rosso's store-of-ug-grotesc-tyes in Argento's shop of terror

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DINNER'S READY! THE GORE-MET

This issue, the Gore-Met serves up Nick Palumbo's condemned and contrived *Murder-Set-Pieces*, an undercooked, syphilitic steak that tastes very much like the slasher films of the disco era – a traditional recipe marinated in the blood of sexual torture and seasoned with child murder and cannibalism.



Murder-Set-Pieces: A sadistic geek show.

MURDER-SET-PIECES

Starring Sven Garrett, Valerie Baber and Jade Rissor

Written and directed by Nick Palumbo

Fright Flax Productions/Blackwatch Releasing

The roots of the slasher film reach back to H.G. Lewis' seminal gorefest *Blood Feast* (1963), if not Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Until the early '80s, slasher films were almost without exception exploitation films; lurid grind-house fare of dubious quality sold by boobs and blood. Condemned for their nihilism and sexualized violence, the notoriety of films like *The Toolbox Murders* (1978) and *Maniac* (1980) assured brisk rental business in the then-expanding home video market. Nick Palumbo's *Murder-Set-Pieces* is an ultra-gory homage to that sleazy era, and a loose re-imagining of his first film, an independent no-budget shot-on-video quickie called *Autrag* (RMA26).

Like the films of its inspiration, *Murder-Set-*

Pieces is a series of horrific, violent and ultimately tedious sex crimes hung on the flimsiest of frames. Ripped straight out of Romano Scavolini's infamous *Nightmare* (1981), a muscle-bound maniac known only as "The Photographer" rapes, tortures, and cannibalizes an endless supply of porn-perfect strippers and prostitutes, all the while shouting in German and frothing at the mouth. An utterly neglected girlfriend (Baber) and her nosy prepubescent sister (Rissor) provide just enough plot points to move the film from one savage, gore-caked showcase murder to the next. Tony Todd (Candyman) and original Texas Chainsaw Massacre cast members Ed Neal and Gunnar Hansen help break the monotony with brief cameos.

In true exploitation tradition, Palumbo gleefully courts controversy by marketing this film on the level of graphic violence depicted onscreen. On that, it delivers in bloody spades (Toe Tag Productions, the special effects team behind the heinous *August Underground* films [RMA31], orchestrated the outrageously gory murders). Not content with depicting chainsaw dismemberment, cannibalism and necrophilia, Palumbo attempts to depict even further by having *The Photographer* put a little girl in a park washroom. And, just like feces in a monkey cage, Nazi imagery and footage of the Twin Towers burning are flung about just in case anyone still isn't offended. So why wasn't I offended?

Well, it might have something to do with the fact that the vacuous plot, dire lack of characterization, and repetitive nature of the extreme violence render this film little more than a ludicrous, albeit sadistic, geek show. Sven Garrett, as *The Photographer*, is two shades of intense – brooding and manic – and while convincing, is utterly one-dimensional. Victims walk onscreen to be immediately stripped, hung upside down and splattered in blood. Only little Rissor manages to navigate the gaping plot holes and exhibit anything approaching range. That said,

this film would be more than easy to dismiss if it weren't so damned well-made.

Murder-Set-Pieces was beautifully shot on 35mm film by Troma alumni Brendan Flynt, and masterfully edited by Todd C. Ramsay, best known for his work with John Carpenter on *Escape from New York* and *The Thing*. The score, with strains of spaghetti splatter glory provided by artists including The Giallo's Flame and Zombi, is used to maximum effect. Palumbo's film displays flashes of visual brilliance reminiscent of the best works of Argento, and references to slasher classics like *Tourist Trap* (1979), *Don't Go in the House* (1980), and *Pieces* (1982) are peppered throughout the film. As a peen to the films of this era, *Murder-Set-Pieces* is unlovable but immensely satisfying.

It's a shame, really. The movie represents a stylistic and technical accomplishment for Palumbo, but one that will likely be eclipsed by the controversy it will no doubt attract. Of course, this is exactly what the director intends.

✂

A Nazi-lovin' kid killin' corpse eatin' psychopath! Why am I not offended?



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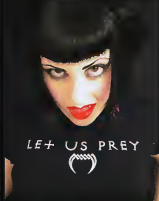
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SONGS FROM THE VIDEO DROME



PUNK ROCK HOLOCAUST

Directed by Doug Sakmann

BACKSEAT CONCEPTIONS

It's summer 2003 and someone's knocking off the bands and fans of the Vans Warped Tour in bloody, disgusting fashion. No, this isn't my personal fantasy come to life, it's a super low-budget, amateur slasher comedy filled with performance footage and tunes from Warped Tour players like Andrew W.K., Rancid, and, luckily, Audio Drome faves Horrorpops and The Phenomenauts. Spawned from the demented mind of ex-Troma guy Doug Sakmann, the barely comprehensible plot follows a tour reporter as she tries to unravel the mysterious murders while Warped honcho Kevin Lyman looks the other way. A lack of legitimate actors adds to the film's utter rookie status, but an inspired performance by Tromalord Lloyd Kaufman as the evil corporate rock label owner Belaf nearly saves the day. Really, Punk Rock Holocaust is less a movie than a montage of various band members being oried in phony, over-the-top kill scenes. That might sound pretty cool, but it's actually way too comy and fake for even the bastard offspring of a Troma flick. Included as extras are three commentary tracks (one of which is only available online), music videos lifted straight from the film, a short blooper reel, underground film trailers, hilarious sketch comedy from Cheese Theatre, and more. Whoop. **AL** ☼



KOBOLD

A Taste of Copper EP

KOBOLD MEDIA

According to our good friend the Internet, a kobold is either a mischievous gnome or German folklore that haunts underground places, or the name of a sneaky biped gecko creature from Dungeons & Dragons lore. While former Audio Drome denizen Greg Chant could have said for sure (god rest his soul), I can tell you it's also the name of an electronic collaboration between two mischievous New Mexico producers named Cody Cast and Mike Heighway. Their finely-tuned Taste of Copper EP features a fairly ferocious helping of downbeat industrial and includes their calling card single Human Cages (think anything from Skinny Puppy's Remission). For post-apocalyptic cyber-sounds, follow the gnome to www.kobold-media.com. **TD** ☼☼☼/1/2



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Go Go Graveyard Rockin' With

DEAD BOY WHISKEYS

Graesser power: engage! Newly inked to Geoff (Tiger Army) Kresge's label, 12 Step Rebels is Jakob Ilesano on vocals/guitar, Hamburger Nabo Hancock on upright bass, and Mad Dog Chad on skins. On Go Go Graveyard Rockin', the quirky Albuquerque Brylcreem lovers set coffin lids a rockin' with twelve cuts of night-eyes rockabilly punk featuring a sad song about the isolation of an unborn creation (The Ballad Of Frankenstein's Monster) and a strong warning to never, ever fuck with their hair (Hair Song). What else could you ask for? Plus it's 80 percent Tomb-approved! **TD** ☼☼☼



PSYCHO CHARGER

Horror Rawkability!!

ANTIPODE RECORDS

Flaming devil skull tattoo art album cover: check. Sinister vocal distortion over menacing guitar twang: check. Wacky horror movie sound bites: check. Songs about truckers, murderers, zombies, and rednecks: check, and check. New York's — sorry, New York's — Psycho Charger have their psychobilly bases covered, but they know that alone won't cut it, so the threesome performs nearly naked, save for liberal amounts of fake blood, and camps it up real good on tracks like Invasion Of The Ball Snatchers ("Little green man from the planet Mars/Wants to put my balls in one of his jans"). Their "Ultra-Horrific Psycho Raw-Kill-Billy!!!" sound gets mono-chord monotonous after awhile, but a big dripping A for effort. **DA** ☼☼☼



ASHES OF OCTOBER

Last Words of the Crucified

SHROPS RECORDS

It's really startling to wear on me just how many horror punk bands soldier on in the well-worn path first tread by the genre's defining band. The Misfits will always be to punk music what Night of the Living Dead is to the modern zombie film (and rightly so), but if I hear one more bed Darguz impression I think I'm gonna tear out my devil lock! Case in point: Last Words of the Crucified from Georgia's Ashes Of October. They've got some well-written songs with appropriate titles (Silent Night, Bloody Night, Nevermore, etc.) and some killer churchyard keys, but their Darguz-

on-dope vocals sink them deep in the well-intentioned, bottomless barrel of banality we dig though daily down here in the Drome. **TD** ☼



THE MATADORS

The Devil's Music

STUMBLE RECORDS

From the foggy streets of London (Ontario) come The Matadors, Canada's official defenders of the psychobilly crown. Brimming with frantic and sexy songs, The Devil's Music kicks off with the blistering Devil's Mistress, followed by the cool Johnny Cash-style ballad Burning Desire, then slides into some raunchy rock 'n' roll innuendo (Pink Lincoln) and a soulful surf rocker about short-skinned Succubi. For what it's worth, I prefer the version of The Evil Eye used on Shamble Records' Zombie Night in Canada compilation, (just one more reason to get out there and snatch one up), but The Matadors still kick tail and, baby, that's no bull! **TD** ☼☼☼



THE DEATH RIDERS

No Mercy

(INDEPENDENT)

The Death Riders should be attracting plenty of attention thanks to the presence of one Blasko of Rob Zombie bass-playing fame. Founded by Johnny Coffin of the Coffin Case Company (manufacturer of coffin-shaped guitar cases), The Death Riders take some of spook rock's well-worn influences — surf, punk and rockabilly — and crank up the guitar crunch to a level more suitable for fans of Blasko's former project. The title track is an outright lockdown, sounding a little too much like something off the Resident Evil



Virginia's **Hexentanz** conjures up medieval black magic with *Nekrocrafte*, a soundtrack of authentic arcane witch chants, rendered with ancient instruments and human bones.

Songs of Evil

by Heather Adler

When electric guitar birthed rock 'n' roll, it was quickly branded "the Devil's music," but even at its loudest, angriest and most theatrical, it doesn't approximate the genuinely harrowing experience of Hexentanz, a musical project tapping into the occult at its most historically profane and darkly disconcerting.

This Virginia-based group, which is the combined efforts of the Lucifer-themed electronic/industrial outfit Psychonaut 75 and medieval-premiered act The Soil Bleeds Black, isn't selling cartoon witchcraft and pop-culture devil worship — it's the real deal. Its five members — Dana Dark, Lux Fero (Davincia), Michael Ford and brothers Mark and Michael Riddick — are practicing witches well-versed in medieval magic and other such persuasions of the left-hand tradition. Their music represents an authentic attempt to bring the ideals of the Witches' Sabbat alive through music made from ancient instruments, arcane chants steeped in cult traditions, and even human bones.

"The music is not necessarily generated for entertainment purposes," Hexentanz multi-instrumentalist, Michael Riddick told *Rue Morgue*. "The objective of the project is to establish a musical or auditory environment that embodies themes from medieval witchcraft. We really wanted to capture the essence of that era and those ideas in the music."

And they do just that. Using pseudo-period instruments, including a kangling (human thigh bone flute, borrowed from Tibetan monks), vari-

ous recorders, pipe chanters, random experimental noises, electronic voice phenomena recordings and the band members' own distorted, chant-like vocals, Hexentanz creates a virtual soundtrack to a medieval witch's gathering. On the group's debut full-length album, *Nekrocrafte* (distributed by The Fossil Dungeon), songs like Mark Of The Witch, Abjuring The Cross, and Devil's Mass all have an ominous, decidedly evil sound — like a black mass held in the imagination's deepest hell.

"The use of human bones [in our music] is a very visceral way of communicating the theme of necromancy," Riddick explains. "A lot of the themes and workings of the rituals of the Witches' Sabbat deal with death and dying, and a lot of the initiatory rites and rites of passage that were used by Shamans of the past would include the theme of death, so the use of human bones largely speaks to that theme. Those symbols were agents of communication, and occasionally the magicians would impose the essence of a spirit into the fetish item as well."

Riddick, who holds a degree in philosophy with a focus on comparative religion, says his definition of magic is as a metaphysical understanding of reality — actions that are relevant to manifesting desires — and the traditional Shamanic rituals play a large role in both his life and music.

"Shamanic rites in the Witches' Sabbat involve a visionary episode of death," he says, "causing an adventure into the underworld where a divine

teacher [Satan] grants magical powers to celebrate the newfound relationship between the human and the divine."

Challenging prejudices against alternative religious philosophy plays just as important a role for the members of Hexentanz as their personal beliefs do. The choir-like chanting on the album is a composition of authentic ritualistic recordings and the members' own vocals, twisted to "provide a deeper perversion" of a medieval church choir. That, along with all the other black magic elements, is designed to confront convictions.

"During the Middle Ages the church basically had control over everything," Riddick notes. "Anyone outside of the Latin mass, including Jews or anyone else, was considered to be almost an enemy of the church. In a sense, the heretics of that period would practice sorcery and witchcraft as a form of rebellion against the pressure of the church."

He goes on to compare the age-old conflict to modern times with respect to Christianity versus Islam, and says Hexentanz is, in one way, a backlash against the religious right.

Although he believes the group's music is undoubtedly frightening to anyone who hasn't been exposed to the traditions it deals with, Riddick hopes the bleak, menacing wickedness will elicit some sort of enlightenment through meditation on the complacencies of life. For many listeners, though, Hexentanz represents a symphony of raw, undiluted darkness. Or as he puts it, "a horrific journey into the unknown and dark recesses of the spirit."

Nekrocrafte is available at www.fossil-dungeon.com.



NOW PLAYING ON RADIO

MR. HYDE

Noncore

Barn of the Naked Dead
Psycho+Logical Records

Barn of the Naked Dead, by Mr. Hyde, good buddy and protégé of gore-rap wizard Necro, is brutally violent, sadistic, twisted, insane horrorcore. Hyde's style is steady and monotonous, and there's no mistaking the glaring lack of talent here, but that's okay because Hyde gets your attention anyway with some of the most disturbing tracks laid down... in any genre. The bizarre nightmare title song is memorable, but it's *Knife in Your Spine* — a take on Goblin's main Suspina theme — that'll have you foaming blood at the mouth. Yes, the album is repulsively offensive, but sometimes so are those gore films we keep feeding our eyeballs. Only in the Drome could Barn of the Naked Dead be considered beautiful. **AL** ☹☹☹☹



soundtrack, but the other two songs on this EP give hope for some old school graveyard punk fun. Still, we'll wait for the debut full-length, *Soundtrack For Depression*, to be released early next year, before getting our nooses in a knot. **AL** ☹☹1/2



THE EMPIRE HIDEOUS

Rock/Goth

Say Your Prayers

Hell's Hounded Records

Heavy, guitar-guided Gothic rock that actually doesn't suck. *Say Your Prayers* is poetic pathos from a tortured soul, a.k.a. vocalist Myke Hideosus, former Misch/SpySociety99 singer and author of the biography *King of an Empire to the Shoes of a Misch*. Hideosus stretches conceptual sor-

row from skin to musical bone with despondent lyrics and high-string guitar leads on Goth anthem *Two Minutes Till Midnight* and the radio-friendly verses in *Heaven Raining Bullets*. Coupled with bleak, sample-soaked interludes and a molodious ballad (*Bound To Happen*) that sounds like a forgotten Smiths B-side from the '80s, *Prayers* is politics, philosophy and the devil nailed high atop a cross. Enjoy. **TD** ☹☹☹☹



NECRO

The Pre-Fix For Death

Psycho+Logical Records

One of the proudest purveyors in death rap, Necro continues to produce sick and sadistic music with *The Pre-Fix For Death*. With a

background in the underground death metal network, Necro enlists the aid of members of Voivod, Obituary and Hatebreed to beef up the brutality, but make no mistake, this is a hip-hop album through and through. The lyrical content actually boasts little gore, with Necro delving into Satanism, serial killers, and everything else dark and evil instead. Name drops include George Romero and Anton LaVey, but *The Pre-Fix For Death* also gets political at times, taking on the horrors of the front page of your daily newspaper, as opposed to, say, those in the mag you're holding right now. **AL** ☹☹☹1/2



FULL BLOWN CHAOS

Noncore

Wake the Demons

Shredcore Records

Listening to the new *Full Blown Chaos* album is like hosting a not in your CD player and only the underworld is invited. Songs like *Wake The Demon*, *Burned Alive*, *Chains Of Bloodshed*, and, naturally, *Apocalypse* dive home-first into the old fire and brimstone horror imagery (condemnation, suffering, legions of the damned, etc.). The band's hardcore assault is tight and militant, with breakneck change-ups giving the foot pedals a merciless workout. You've heard it all before, but the foursome plays that formula hard and knows when to get the hell out (most songs are under three minutes), saving *Wake The Demons* from hellfire burnout. Way to keep the apocalypse on schedule, boys. **DA** ☹☹☹☹



RAMMSTEIN

Industrial/Metal

Reise, Reise

Universal

Ach, schüssel I was practically shugging in my lederhosen for months in anticipation of our fave Teutonic terrors' fourth full-length, and while *Reise, Reise* isn't a total dud, it falls painfully short of the band's own standards. Production is a tad more organic this time around, which is generally a good thing — apparently Rammstein's budget can now accommodate real orchestras and choirs — and the lads bravely dish out a couple of unorthodox numbers like *Los* and *Moskau*. But they come up shockingly short in the anthem department with a largely indistinguishable series of mid-tempo trudges and ballads. Nothing comes close to the infectious, fet-in-the-air appeal of *Du Hast*, *Horst*, *Mich* or *Engel*. *Reise* may be competent enough to win over the uninitiated, but for longtime fans (myself, some of the Rue Crew and numerous Toronto-area strippers) it's a letdown. Gott im Himmel. **JWB** ☹☹☹



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PLAY DEAD



GRAPHICS



PLAYABILITY



SHIVERS

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE



RESIDENT EVIL 4

Capcom
Nintendo GameCube

Looking for a change of pace from the ordinary rotten brain-spilling action in Raccoon City? The newest adventure in the Resident Evil series drops you off in some grand European shithole to battle pitchfork swinging maniacs instead of the familiar shambling undead. A lot of blood, sweat and tears (and presumably more blood) surely went into making Resident Evil 4, by far the best GameCube title to date.

Playing as familiar AE cop Leon Kennedy, you must rescue the President's daughter who's vacationing in friggin' Zombie Village, Spain. Presented in letterboxed format (finally), the attention to detail is so incredible you can almost smell the disgusting sewers and feel the blood-spraying from the stumps of headless maniacs.

Playability has also increased exponentially over past entries with interactive cut scenes and a targeting system that allows players to pick an area on an attacker's body to pulverize (gory results vary). Plus, instead of simply finding weapons lying around, as in previous versions of the game, you can now purchase some serious hardware, including an explosive mine-throwing gun. The moody new soundtrack further envelops you in a gaming experience that may lead to horrible nightmares. And that's the point, isn't it?



COMING SOON

Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil

Three official expansion to last year's Doom 3, up to eight-player support in multiplayer modes, in addition to new locations, characters and weapons.

The Nightmare Before Christmas: Dogie's Revenge

Jack Skellington returns once again to save Halloweeners from the treacherous Dogie Boogie.

Darkwatch

Jencho is a lowdown train robber, but he never meant to hijack a train filled with rotting corpses. Better watch where you sleep, partner.

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening

A prequel to the original demonic fantasy adventure game with even more blood and guts than before. Overrated!

Cold Fear

Being in the Great Gatsby is hard enough, but having to kill monsters on decrepit Russian sailing ships makes it all worthwhile.

Bloody Waters: Terror from the Deep

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water... wait a second who did you it was safe?

Phantom Dust

Not only is development in letters, but speculators have overrun the world. Kick some serious ass and uncover the mysterious the haunting phantom dust in this third-person shooter.



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

PC
Activision

You no longer have to hang around seedy goth bars to get your fill of strippers and anemic female fatalities in latex or schoolgirl outfits, thanks to Activision's Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines, a PC game set in the murky, sexy vampire underworld.

Based on White Wolf's popular Vampire line of role-playing games, Bloodlines marries the complexity of a RPG with the intensity of a first-person shooter. Once you choose a type of vampire - anything from jiggly, sweater-kitten vamp to brooding, black trench coat-clad, undead nancy boy - you're ready for action.

Game play depends on which clan you choose your character from, some are mortal-friendly, while others downright evil. As play progresses, you collect weapons, spells and skills (guns, razor-sharp fangs for melee attacks, climbing ability, psychic powers, lock-picking skills, etc.) to use on miscreants, such as clearing out a crack house full of zombies. Your clan also determines who you fight and what upgrades you earn so multiple storylines, combined with the RPG element, make for good replay action. The only drawbacks to Bloodlines are problems with the game's Valve engine (occasional glitches and clipping), but don't let it bother you because, after all, you are immortal.



ALL WOUND UP

Board Game
Twilight Creations

You've dug your way out of the grave and you're starving for fresh brains, but that's easier said than done when you're nothing but a shuffling bag of bones. The ghosts at Twilight Creations have reached deep into the warped recesses of their spooky souls to come up with All Wound Up, a board game utilizing wind-up zombie toys.

Being a mindless zombie in All Wound Up is simple, two to four players let their little plastic ghasts amble across a cemetery game board, collecting delicious gray matter and sometimes stumbling into freshly dug graves or mausoleums. Cards determine how many times you wind your toy and in which direction you face it while trying to make it out the front gate and towards that delightful college sorority house across the street. First one there feasts on bimbo brains!



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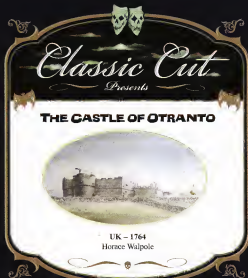
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It's not a stretch to crown Horace Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford and Member of British Parliament from 1741 to 1767, the first horror geek. A learned aristocrat who moved in the important cultural and political circles of his time, Walpole's real passion was for medieval ruins and romances. These romances were steeped in impossibly virtuous knights and ladies put to the test by cruel tyrants, family curses, and various supernatural and demonic entities. In an era that dubbed itself the Age of Reason and prided itself on having finally shrugged off the superstitions and tyrannies of the Catholic Middle Ages, reading about ancient curses and haunted castles was hardly encouraged.

But Walpole was so wrapped up in the creepy allure of the Middle Ages that he even had a fake Gothic castle with brooding turrets and an armoury built on his estate. He also wrote what is considered to be the first horror novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole subtitled it *A Gothic Tale*, tipping his hat to the story's roots in the obscure medieval ballads and romances he collected from across Europe.

Walpole wasn't interested in adding another damsel-in-distress tale to the canon, though. *The Castle of Otranto* retains many elements of the medieval tales that so entranced Walpole, like much of the overheated dialogue, for example, that would be right at home in a chivalrous King Arthur tale, or on a Ronnie James Dio-era Black Sabbath album, for that matter.

The novel opens with the wedding of the sickly son of the Prince of Otranto and the beautiful orphaned Isabella. But before the groom can reach the altar he is crushed to a pulp by a giant helmet that seemingly falls from heaven. Prince Manfred, obsessed with finding a male heir, decides to marry Isabella himself. The problem is he's already married. In addition, his grandfather came to the throne through shifty political maneuvers, one of which may have involved murdering Alfonso the Good, the rightful Prince of Otranto. The helmet that killed Manfred's son bears an uncanny resemblance to the helmet on the statue of Alfonso in the local church. Manfred suspects that time has caught up to him when the ghost of a knight begins to stalk his gloomy castle.

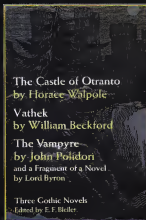
What follows are many plot turns and heroic deeds as the curse inexorably snuffs out hope for Manfred's bloodline. Where *Otranto* differs from its literary influences, however, is in Walpole's harnessing of clichéd settings and plot devices to create completely new atmospheric and narrative effects that highlight supernatural elements and the guilt-ridden psyches of the more conflicted characters. His emphasis on the uncanny and antique demonstrated that old castles and ghosts could do more than form the backdrop for a tale of chivalry and daring—they could generate a new type of story that gave voice to the irrational fears and yearnings of the urban, rationalistic, democratic society emerging in Europe at the end of the 18th century.

The novel's success proved there was an audience for detailed descriptions of labyrinthine dungeons, crumbling tombs and castles, and ghosts—especially if a desirable virgin or two were added. While the scholars of the time were heralding the dawn of a new age of reason and light, the skeptical average reader was more interested in brooding over the mysteries of the past and the darker regions of their own psyches.

The Castle of Otranto also established what would become one of the horror genre's most potent motifs: the dead weight of the past, often in the form of a curse or a ghost or monster, crushing (or hacking to death) the hopes of a younger generation. This motif would be refined and modernized by Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, and Sheridan Le Fanu, all of whom situated their best works in dingy, enclosed buildings or brooding, crumbling landscapes.

Countless horror novels, slasher flicks and ghost stories have since exploited the imaginative possibilities of a past crime or tragedy re-enacting itself from beyond the grave, with recent recreations coming from Spanish and Latin American directors such as Alejandro Amenábar (*The Others*) and Guillermo del Toro (*The Devil's Backbone*). The medieval castle of the gothic novel is easily transformed into a high school,

decadent mansion or insane asylum, and there are plenty of dark secrets from our collective past to fill these buildings with angry ghosts.



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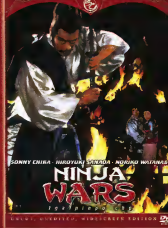
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